

Laughter in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Times

Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture

Edited by
Albrecht Classen and Marilyn Sandidge

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De Gruyter

Laughter in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Times

Epistemology of a Fundamental Human Behavior,
its Meaning, and Consequences

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Albrecht Classen

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ISBN 978-3-11-024547-9
e-ISBN 978-3-11-024548-6
ISSN 1864-3396

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Laughter in the Middle Ages and early modern times : epistemology of a fundamental human behavior, its meaning, and consequences / edited by Albrecht Classen.

p. cm. — (Fundamentals of medieval and early modern culture ; 5)

Includes index.

ISBN 978-3-11-024547-9 (alk. paper)

1. Laughter in literature. 2. Humor in literature. 3. Laughter — History. 4. Humor — History. 5. Laughter — Philosophy. 6. Laughter — Religious aspects. 7. Wit and humor, Medieval. 8. Wit and humor — History and criticism. I. Classen, Albrecht.

PN56.L3L39 2010

809'.93354—dc22

2010011924

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available in the Internet at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>.

© 2010 Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co. KG, Berlin/New York
Printing and binding: Hubert & Co. GmbH & Co. KG, Göttingen
∞ Printed on acid-free paper

Printed in Germany
www.degruyter.com

Table of Contents

Albrecht Classen

Laughter as an Expression of Human Nature in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period: Literary, Historical, Theological, Philosophical, and Psychological Reflections. Also an Introduction	1
--	---

Chapter 1

Judith Hagen

Laughter in Procopius's <i>Wars</i>	141
---	-----

Chapter 2

Livnat Holtzman

"Does God Really Laugh?" – Appropriate and Inappropriate Descriptions of God in Islamic Traditionalist Theology	165
--	-----

Chapter 3

Daniel F. Pigg

Laughter in <i>Beowulf</i> : Ambiguity, Ambivalence, and Group Identity Formation	201
--	-----

Chapter 4

Mark Burde

The <i>Parodia sacra</i> Problem and Medieval Comic Studies	215
---	-----

Chapter 5

Olga V. Trokhimenko

Women's Laughter and Gender Politics in Medieval Conduct Discourse	243
---	-----

Chapter 6

Madelon Köhler-Busch

Pushing Decorum: Uneasy Laughter in

Heinrich von dem Türlin's *Diu Crône* 265**Chapter 7**

Connie L. Scarborough

Laughter and the Comic in a Religious Text:

The Example of the *Cantigas de Santa Maria* 281**Chapter 8**

John Sewell

The Son Rebelled and So the Father Made Man Alone:

Ridicule and Boundary Maintenance in the *Nizzahon Vetus* 295**Chapter 9**

Birgit Wiedl

Laughing at the Beast: The *Judensau*:

Anti-Jewish Propaganda and Humor

from the Middle Ages to the Early Modern Period 325

Chapter 10

Fabian Alfie

Yes . . . but was it funny? Cecco Angiolieri,

Rustico Filippi and Giovanni Boccaccio 365

Chapter 11

Nicolino Applauso

Curses and Laughter in Medieval Italian Comic Poetry:

The Ethics of Humor in Rustico Filippi's Invectives 383

Chapter 12

Feargal Ó Béarra

Tromdhámh Guaire: a Context for Laughter

and Audience in Early Modern Ireland 413

Chapter 13

Jean E. Jost

Humorous Transgression in the Non-Conformist Fabliaux:

A Bakhtinian Analysis of Three Comic Tales 429

Chapter 14

Gretchen Mieszkowski

Chaucerian Comedy: *Troilus and Criseyde* 457**Chapter 15**

Sarah Gordon

Laughing and Eating in the Fabliaux 481

Chapter 16

Christine Bousquet-Labou  rie

Laughter and Medieval Stalls 499

Chapter 17

Scott L. Taylor

Vox populi e voce professionis: Processus juris joco-serius.

Esoteric Humor and the Incommensurability of Laughter 515

Chapter 18

Jean N. Goodrich

“So I thought as I Stood, To Mirth Us Among”:

The Function of Laughter in *The Second Shepherds’ Play* 531**Chapter 19**

Albrecht Classen

Laughing in Late-Medieval Verse (*m  ren*) andProse (*Schw  nke*) Narratives: Epistemological Strategies

and Hermeneutic Explorations 547

Chapter 20

Rosa Alvarez Perez

The Workings of Desire: Panurge and the Dogs 587

Chapter 21

Elizabeth Chesney Zegura

Laughing Out Loud in the *Heptaméron*: A Reassessment
 of Marguerite de Navarre's Ambivalent Humor 603

Chapter 22

Lia B. Ross

You had to be there: The Elusive Humor of the *Sottie* 621

Chapter 23

Kyle DiRoberto

Sacred Parody in Robert Greene's *Groatsworth of Wit* (1592) 651

Chapter 24

Martha Moffitt Peacock

The Comedy of the Shrew: Theorizing Humor in
 Early Modern Netherlandish Art 667

Chapter 25

Jessica Tvordi

The Comic Personas of Milton's *Prolusion VI*:
 Negotiating Masculine Identity Through Self-Directed Humor 715

Chapter 26

Robert J. Alexander

Ridentum dicere verum (Using Laughter to Speak the Truth):
 Laughter and the Language of the Early Modern
 Clown "Pickelhering" in German Literature
 of the Late Seventeenth Century (1675-1700) 735

Chapter 27

Thomas Willard

Andreae's *ludibrium*: Menippean Satire in the *Chymische Hochzeit* 767

Chapter 28

Diane Rudall

The Comic Power of Illusion-Allusion: Laughter, *La Devineresse*,
 and the Scandal of a Glorious Century 791

Chapter 29

Allison P. Coudert

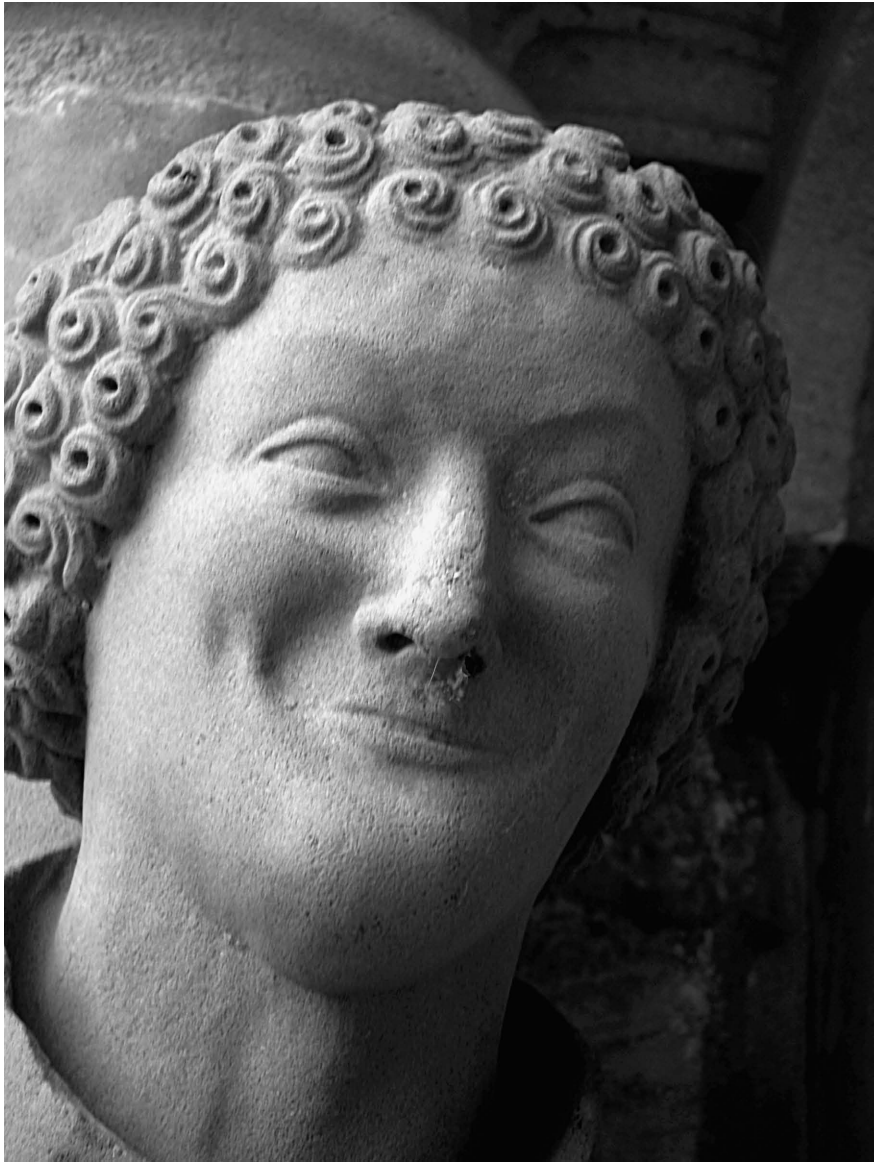
Laughing at Credulity and Superstition in the

Long Eighteenth Century 803

List of Illustrations 831

Contributors 835

Index 847



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Laughter as an Expression of Human Nature in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period: Literary, Historical, Theological, Philosophical, and Psychological Reflections. Also an Introduction¹

Human beings tend to laugh on many occasions and for countless reasons, whether in antiquity or today, whether in Asian, African, or Western culture. Most people at one time or another engage in, and engage one another with humor, wit, jokes, comedy, ridicule, and the like, even though each country, language, religion, or society expresses itself somewhat differently, laughs about somewhat different objects, comments, or images.² Whether animals laugh, as some people claim, cannot be determined easily, if at all,³ but we can be certain that laughter, just like

¹ I would like to express my gratitude to Elisabeth C. Zegura, The University of Arizona, and Marilyn Sandidge, Westfield State College, MA, for their critical reading of this introduction. Mark Burde, University of Michigan, also offered most helpful constructive criticism. Jean N. Goodrich, University of Arizona, was kind enough to point out some additional errors and misspellings. Of course, all remaining mistakes are my own. I am also very grateful to Susanne Mang from Walter De Gruyter for her assistance in the final copy-editing process.

² For some Dutch perspectives, for instance, see Johan Verberckmoes, *Schertsen, schimpen en schateren: Geschiedenis van het lachen in de zuidelijke Nederlanden, zestiende en zeventiende eeuw*. Memoria (Nijmegen: SUN, 1998); Rudolf Dekker, *Lachen inde gouden Eeuw: een geschiedenis van de Nederlandse humor*. Historische reeks (Amsterdam: Wereldbibliotheek, 1997); see also Ali Abdul, *Arab Legacy to Humour Literature* (New Delhi: M. D. Publisher, 1998); *Humor in Arabic Culture*, ed. Georges Tamer (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2009). This list could be extended infinitely because laughter is such a mainstay in all cultures throughout time.

³ Norman R. F. Maier and T. C. Schneirla, *Principles of Animal Psychology* (New York: Dover Publications, 1964); Rajpal Kaur, *Animal Psychology: New Trends and Innovations* (New Delhi: Deep & Deep Publications, 2006); E. P. Evans, *Evolutional Ethics and Animal Psychology* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1898; rpt. s.l.: Gardner Books, 2007). See also Mary Douglas, "Do Dogs Laugh? A Cross-Cultural Approach to Body Symbolism," eadem, *Implicit Meanings: Essays in Anthropology*

anger and sorrow, represents one of the fundamental aspects of human life—as much in the Middle Ages as today—and reveals essential characteristics if we analyze it carefully and comprehensively, even if this takes the ‘fun’ out of the joke because of the intellectual analysis.

As many experiments have demonstrated, people laugh when they are tickled, for example, meaning that there is a sensory relationship between physical input and behavioral output, as Aristotle had already recognized;⁴ but the central point of our investigations will be laughter that results from a certain thought process in response to a surprise development, or a reaction to a curious situation, odd behavior, images, and the like. In other words, laughter implies extensive and complex thought processes that happen consciously or not, but which are certainly in contradiction to the standards, norms, and common ideals of a specific community. The analysis of laughter, or of a comical situation, of public humor, and group joking consequently allows us to gain deeper insight into the way people interact and communicate with each other, how they view their world, and what constitutes, by default, their identity and value system.

By the same token, the semantic range of meanings of the medieval terms for ‘laughter,’ in Latin ‘ridere,’ in Old French ‘rire/sourire,’ and in Middle High German ‘lachen,’ for instance, proves to be extensive and requires ever new investigations based on the context and specific philosophical intention pursued by an author. This analysis will always have to take into account the universally present ambivalence and complexity of the subject matter, speech act, discussion, and communication.⁵ Moreover, laughter implies a plethora of intentions, strategies, forms of aggression; it can also hide fear and insecurity, or expose an individual’s deeply-hidden feelings.

To be more precise, the point of our examination cannot be to question what is comical, funny, satirical, or ironic all by itself or in isolation, which would require a vast perspective and countless investigations into specific social, historical, and economic contexts, taking into consideration endless amounts of literary and art-historical material, for instance. In fact, such an endeavor would actually require

(London and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), 83–89.

⁴ Helen Adolf, “On Mediaeval Laughter,” *Speculum* 22.2 (1947): 251–53; here 251. Citing Boethius’s *In Isagogen Porphyrii commenta*, who had stated that “omnis homo risibile est, et nulla alia species risibile potest proprio nuncupari,” Adolf points out the uninterrupted admiration of Aristotle’s logic in this regard, without anyone ever questioning this position by means of animal experiments. She also alerts us to the curious phenomenon that many medieval philosophers acknowledged laughing as a characteristic element of man’s property, yet, at the same time, excluded it from his essence.

⁵ Philipp Ménard, *Le Rire et le sourire dans le roman courtois en France au Moyen Âge (1150–1250)*. Publications romanes et françaises, 105 (Geneva: Droz, 1969), 28–34, 431–32; for a critical response, see Barbara Nelson Sargent, “Mediaeval Rire, Ridere: A Laughing Matter?” *Medium Aevum* XLIII.2 (1974): 116–32.

that we study each document individually without the larger picture or the social context in mind. Instead, the focus will rest on performative aspects, laughter in public, or at least in a group, even if only two people are involved, or within the context of specific situations, and all these dealt with in medieval and early-modern material (literature, visual objects) where laughter is unmistakably indicated or implied.⁶ Laughing represents both a theatrical act and also an expression of personal feelings and thoughts.⁷

Those who laugh either join a community or invite others to create one because laughter excludes and includes, it attacks and belittles, but it also evokes sympathy and understanding. Any survey study of medieval literature would quickly unearth this remarkable phenomenon that pleasure and entertainment received great attention because they constituted an essential aspect of medieval culture at large.⁸ Laughter was commonly identified as a very important therapeutic instrument, justifying the performance of music, literature (narration), and drama. In Glending Olson's words: "The popular *Secretum secretorum* similarly lists 'pleasaunt songis' and 'delectabil bookis' among the pleasures that work to better people's 'helth and digestion'. The *Tacuinum sanitatis* includes an entry on the *confabulator* in its inventory of items related to hygiene; a good conversationalist-storyteller (*recitator fabularum*) will know both the right material and the best strategies of presentation in order to bring pleasure to an audience, which in turn will purify people's blood, enhance digestion and promote untroubled sleep."⁹

⁶ For some important preliminary thoughts about laughter in the Middle Ages, see Jacques Le Goff, "Rire au Moyen Age," *Les Cahiers du Centre de Recherches Historiques* 3 (1989), here quoted from the online version at: <http://ccrh.revues.org/index2918.html> (last accessed on Jan. 30, 2010). He emphasizes, for instance: "La société prend l'habitude de se regarder dans un miroir, les états du monde aperçoivent leur image ridicule: d'où le développement de la satire et de la parodie, et, du côté de l'Eglise, comme pour le rêve, comme pour le geste, l'établissement d'un contrôle du rire. Et au niveau des moeurs, on retrouve l'importance de la cour comme milieu de domestication du rire." Referring to St. Francis of Assisi, Le Goff adds the important observation regarding laughter in the spiritual sphere: "Le rire devient véritablement une forme de spiritualité et de comportement." Overall, however, Le Goff does not reach a radical breakthrough and mostly summarizes what previous scholars have said about laughter, commenting, for instance, on its communicative function within a group, a social class, or an intellectual milieu. Nevertheless, similar to the approach taken here, Le Goff makes clear how many functions there are that determine laughter as a public phenomenon.

⁷ See, for instance, Matthew Steggle, *Laughing and Weeping in Early Modern Theatres*. Studies in Performance and Early Modern Drama (Aldershot, Hampshire, and Rochester, NY: Ashgate, 2007).

⁸ Glending Olson, "The Profits of Pleasure," *The Middle Ages*, ed. Alastair Minnis and Ian Johnson. The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism, 2 (Cambridge, New York, et al.: Cambridge University Press, 2005; paperback ed. 2009), 275–87.

⁹ Olson, "The Profits of Pleasure," 277–78; see also his *Literature as Recreation in the Later Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982), 39–64, 77–83.

In another respect, considering the social and political implications of laughter and general entertainment in public, Werner Röcke and Hans Rudolf Velten have recently observed:

Somit erscheinen uns Lachgemeinschaften zunächst als offene, labile und performative soziale Gebilde, die aus gemeinsamem Gelächter entstehen. Sie sind nicht auf Dauer angelegt, können sich rasch wieder auflösen, sie sind nicht auf eine bestimmte Teilnehmerzahl (mindestens zwei) fixiert und haben keine festen Orte Lachgemeinschaften können über soziale Exklusion oder Inklusion, Reputation oder Verachtung entscheiden. Sie vermögen Machtpositionen durchzusetzen, ermöglichen aber auch Transgressionen der gewohnten Dispositionen des Verhaltens oder aber bestätigen den moralischen oder rechtlichen Konsens einer Gesellschaft, der in der Lachgemeinschaft mit ihrer Hilfe vollzogen und durchgesetzt wird.¹⁰

[Hence we believe that laughing communities are, at first, open, unstable, and performative social structures that develop out of mutual laughter. They are not destined for permanence and can quickly dissolve again; they are not fixated on a specific number of members (at least two, however), and they have no fixed locations. . . . Laughing communities can decide on social exclusion or inclusion, reputation or contempt. They can establish power positions, but they also facilitate transgressions of the usual dispositions of behavior, or they confirm the moral and legal consensus of a society, which is carried out and enacted with the help of the laughing communities.]

Moreover, laughter reflects human culture in a profound fashion insofar as each person who breaks out in laughter has been confronted with an image, an object, a person, an idea, a word or a peculiar sound and responds to it, signaling what value concepts determine him or her, by contrast. As Anton Hügli comments in his concise survey, laughter is always associated with a form of intentionality and rationality because the laughing person recognizes a dissonance; a transgression, disharmony, shortcoming, failure, or an odd, unusual composition of objects or people.¹¹ Laughter signals what the standards and norms might have been, insofar as the one who becomes the butt of the joke has voluntarily or involuntarily crossed some boundaries. Similarly, we would have to consider laughter as fundamentally communicative because “it can be used to express an unending variety of emotions.”¹²

¹⁰ Werner Röcke and Hans Rudolf Velten, “Einleitung,” *Lachgemeinschaften: Kulturelle Inszenierungen und soziale Wirkungen von Gelächter im Mittelalter und in der Frühen Neuzeit*, ed. id. Trends in Medieval Philology, 4 (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2005), IX–XXXI; here XV.

¹¹ Anton Hügli, “Lachen, das Lächerliche,” *Historisches Wörterbuch der Rhetorik*, ed. Gert Ueding, vol. 5 (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 2001), 1–17; here 1.

¹² Martin Grotjahn, *Beyond Laughter* (New York, Toronto, and London: The Blakiston Division, 1957), ix. I disagree, however, with Grotjahn’s corollary that laughter is a “guilt-free release of aggression, and any release makes us perhaps a little better and more capable of understanding one another, ourselves and life Laughter gives freedom, and freedom gives laughter” (ibid.).

The comic by itself results from a conflict between norms, their breach or transgression, though mostly not too egregious to hurt or to insult badly, otherwise laughter would choke in our throats and give way to tears or wrath. Comic triggers laughter, or at least a smile, a chuckle, or a giggle, whereas the tragic causes sorrow, shock, horror, and profound sadness, subsequently expressed in tears and perhaps even screams. In comic, we observe basically two levels of conflicts that erupt in laughter and are compensated thereby. An audience, or an individual, is invited to laugh because the transgression has not caused serious damage to the norms in ethical, religious, social, aesthetic, or sensitive terms. Moreover, laughter signals that there will be sanctions, and harmony can be reconstituted without too many efforts since the entire community backs up the traditional order and regards the sanctions as appropriate. The audience can laugh, for instance, because it feels superior to the ignorant, foolish person on the stage or in its general presence. But there is also the possibility that the transgression of the norms assumes greater proportion, yet the audience, or those who laugh about it, feel that they are on the same level with the foolish or extraordinarily acting person. In that case those who laugh indicate that they are not concerned either about the norms or about the sanctions imposed on the transgressor. In other words, in this situation laughing opens the eyes toward the margin, the obscure, the devious, and relays how much the negative element can be enjoyed and cherished. Accordingly, as Markus Winkler emphasizes, the comic and laughter are highly culture and situation specific, reflecting in a myriad ways, either directly or indirectly, what constitutes norms, ideals, and values. In other words, the study of laughter carries tremendous cultural-historical significance and can be regarded as foundational for all humanistic studies.¹³

For the purpose of this volume, and the present introduction specifically, I will not distinguish as cleanly and rigidly as one might expect or like it, but certainly in conformity with the common approach today in scholarship, between laughter itself—the comical, humor, the ridiculous, guffaws—and, globally speaking, jokes and witticism, among other manifestations of the comic element.¹⁴ They all certainly operate on somewhat different yet interrelated levels, and in different

This is true only in specific cases and cannot be generalized. There is, for instance, laughter out of fear, embarrassed laughter, innocent laughter, and foolish laughter, not to speak of mocking, contemptuous, or satirical laughter, or laughter out of a sense of superiority or inferiority.

¹³ Markus Winkler, "Komik, das Komische: Zur Vorgeschichte des neuzeitlichen Begriffs," *Historisches Wörterbuch der Rhetorik*, ed. Gert Ueding. Vol. 4 (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1998), 1166–68.

¹⁴ This volume will also not deal with specific literary modes of speech or genres connected with laughter, such as satire, irony, parody, jokes, etc., although laughter is regularly informed by such aspects.

genres or communicative situations, at times; but they all share fundamental philosophical characteristics and functions concerning human behavior, thinking, and attitudes. As Arthur Koestler once remarked, "In all its many-splendoured varieties, humour can be simply defined as a type of stimulation that tends to elicit the laughter reflex."¹⁵ Our collective critical approaches will investigate, above all, scenes and moments in the lives of individuals when someone laughs out audibly with a specific intention or reason, if not simply in response to an external event, or when a certain condition makes the by-standers smile or giggle. These are crucial epistemological moments that shed important light on cultural conditions, assumptions, feelings, and traditions.

Henri Bergson refused to constrain the phenomenon of laughter by a narrow definition, and went so far as to acknowledge it as a "comic spirit" which "has a logic of its own, even in its wildest eccentricities. It has a method in its madness. It dreams, I admit, but it conjures up, in its dreams, visions that are at once accepted and understood by the whole of a social group."¹⁶ Although individuals might laugh by themselves, overall, "[o]ur laughter is always the laughter of a group."¹⁷ As he underscores further, laughter is always a basic human trait and pertains only to human life and culture. Moreover, it is intimately connected with an involuntary action or statement within a specific social setting that clashes with new conditions that the individual cannot meet. In Bergson's terms, "For exaggeration to be comic, it must not appear as an aim, but rather as a means that the artist is using in order to make manifest to our eyes the distortions which he sees in embryo" (13). This would also apply to concrete, historical, and cultural conditions where laughter arises out of the conflict between two norms, the one familiar, traditional, and well established; and the other irregular, surprising, and not normative at all, as long as that other norm, or condition, is not threatening to the observer (14–15). We might add, however, that fear and nervousness can also trigger laughter, such as insecure laughter, but that would constitute a different category which Bergson did not consider.

In a further context, Bergson emphasizes the clash between an object or a person, on the one hand, and, on the other, its disguise, masquerade, or ceremony, which, once revealed, triggers laughter: "It might be said that ceremonies are to the social body what clothing is to the individual body: they owe their seriousness to the fact that they are identified, in our minds, with the serious object with which custom

¹⁵ Arthur Koestler, "Humour and Wit," *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15th ed., vol. 9 (Chicago et al.: Helen Hemingway Benton, 1974), 5; here quoted from Dieter Hörhammer, "Humor," in *Ästhetische Grundbegriffe*, vol. 3 (Stuttgart and Weimar: J. B. Metzler, 2001), 66–85; here 68. See also Koestler, *The Act of Creation* (New York: Macmillan, 1964).

¹⁶ Henri Bergson, *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*, trans. by Cloudesley Brereton and Fred Rothwell (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2005), 3.

¹⁷ Bergson, *Laughter*, 4.

associates them, and when we isolate them in imagination, they forthwith lose their seriousness" (20).¹⁸ But Bergson is not content with limiting himself to narrowly drawn perspectives regarding laughter; instead he continues to probe and reveal ever further dimensions, as when he specifies that "any incident is comic that calls our attention to the physical in a person when it is the moral side that is concerned" (22). Here he insightfully examines comic elements in situations and words, and continues by uncovering many further angles that determine laughter in a group setting or alone.

It cannot be the purpose of these few remarks to summarize all of Bergson's findings; suffice it instead to conclude here, with Bergson, that laughter itself represents one of the most complex and multifarious phenomena resulting from human life and determining it as well. As he concludes, "laughter cannot be absolutely just. Nor should it be kind-hearted either. Its function is to intimidate by humiliating. Now, it would not succeed in doing this, had not nature implanted

¹⁸ We find extraordinary evidence for this phenomenon in Ulrich von Liechtenstein's *Frauendienst* (ca. 1255) where the protagonist's disguise as Lady Venus, for instance, is regularly met with happy, communal, laughter; see Albrecht Classen, "Moriz, Tristan, and Ulrich as Master Disguise Artists: Deconstruction and Reenactment of Courtliness in *Moriz von Craûn*, *Tristan als Mönch*, and Ulrich von Liechtenstein's *Frauendienst*," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 103.4 (2004): 475–504. See also the contributions to *Ich – Ulrich von Liechtenstein: Literatur und Politik im Mittelalter: Akten der Akademie Friesach "Stadt und Kultur im Mittelalter," Friesach (Kärnten), 2.–6. September 1996*, ed. Franz Viktor Spechtler and Barbara Maier. Schriftenreihe der Akademie Friesach, 5 (Klagenfurt: Wieser Verlag, 1999). See, for instance, stanza 536, l. 6–8: "min opfer ich so blide an vie, / do ich her von dem opfer gie, / daz man daz pece sa dar truoc, / gelachet wart des da genuoc" (Ulrich von Liechtenstein, *Frauendienst*, ed. Franz Viktor Spechtler. Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik, 485 [Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1987], 117). The English translation reads: "I tripped along so feminine / they laughed—the women and the men. / The kiss of peace was started then" (Ulrich von Liechtenstein's *Service of Ladies*, trans. by J. W. Thomas. University of North Carolina Studies in the Germanic Languages and Literatures, 63 [Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1969]). See also stanza 989, in which the entire company responds to a rhetorical statement about the curiosity of Ulrich having changed so quickly from appearing as a fanciful lady to being the ordinary man they all know: "The knights and I all laughed a bit / as always at such clever wit. / Then those who'd ridden out to me / came thronging in the hostelry" (l. 1–4). Most recently, Hans Rudolf Velten offers an insightful examination of the transformative process involving many ritual functions in the text, making them appear similar, or parallel, to the liturgy: "Sakralisierung und Komisierung im 'Frauendienst' Ulrichs von Liechtenstein," "risus sacer – sacrum risibile": *Interaktionsfelder von Sakralität und Gelächter im kulturellen und historischen Wandel*, ed. Katja Gvozdeva and Werner Röcke. Publikationen zur Zeitschrift für Germanistik. Neue Folge, 20 (Bern, Berlin, et al.: Peter Lang, 2009), 116–45. However, although the onlookers tend to laugh about certain actions or words, the attempt to identify sacral comic in Ulrich's texts seems to be rather problematic. Even Ulrich's self-crippling (cutting off of a non-functioning finger, for example) does not support this reading, at least as far as I can tell (Velten, 137–38). For further passages that contain references to laughing in a variety of contexts, see the *Middle High German Conceptual Database* (last accessed on Jan. 30, 2010) at: <http://www.mhdbdb.sbg.ac.at:8000/mhdbdb/App?action=SelectQuotation&c=FD+3571>.

for that very purpose, even in the best of men, a spark of spitefulness or, at all events, of mischief" (82–83).

Neither philosophers nor theologians, rhetoricians nor semioticians, literary scholars nor art-historians have ever reached a global agreement as to the meaning of laughter, the object of laughter, or how to define concretely the victim or purpose of laughter, although there do not seem to be insurmountable difficulties preventing us from grasping the operative elements and processes involved when people laugh, giggle, chuckle, smile, smirk, or quip with the intent to evoke laughter. Nevertheless, the list of those who have probed the meaning of laughter is long and extends to antiquity, including Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Thomas Hobbes, René Descartes, Immanuel Kant, Arthur Schopenhauer, Søren Kierkegaard, George Santayana, Herbert Spencer, Sigmund Freud, and Henri Bergson.¹⁹ We can gain as much a very solid insight into the mind-set and mentality characteristic of Greek antiquity as to those typical of the Renaissance insofar as the study of laughter is also a study of fundamental cultural conditions.²⁰ Entertainment by itself has never been regarded as sinful or morally debased; it all depends on the context, as numerous comments from the entire Middle Ages confirm.²¹

Only by the eighteenth century do we observe a pronounced distinction between the comical and the ridiculous, whereas for earlier periods we would not have to separate both areas from each other as strictly because neither the concept nor the terminology was in place then. There is nothing that can be objectively described as comical by way of referring to its own nature; instead everything turns into something comical because a subject might perceive it as such and consider it (a person, a word, an object) as incongruent, transgressive, grotesque, or irreverent.²² This finds excellent confirmation in the peasant satire by the Constance notary public Heinrich Wittenwiler, in his *Der Ring* (ca. 1400), in which the stupidity and

¹⁹ John Morreall, *Comic Relief: A Comprehensive Philosophy of Humor* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009). See also the contribution to this volume by Mark Burde.

²⁰ Stephen Halliwell, *Greek Laughter: A Study of Cultural Psychology from Homer to Early Christianity* (Cambridge, New York, et al.: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Daniel Ménager, *La Renaissance et le rire. Perspectives Littéraires* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1995); see also the contributions to *2000 ans de Rire: Permanence et Modernité. Colloque International Grellis-Laseldi/Corhum, Besançon 29–30 Juin, 1er Juillet 2000*, ed. Mongi Madini. Collection Annales littéraires, 741 (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2002), and *The Anatomy of Laughter*, ed. Toby Garfitt, Edith McMorran, and Jane Taylor. *Studies in Comparative Literature*, 8 (Leeds: Maney Publishing: Legenda, 2005); *Lachgemeinschaften: Kulturelle Inszenierungen und soziale Wirkungen von Gelächter im Mittelalter und in der Frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Werner Röcke and Hans Rudolf Velten. *Trends in Medieval Philology*, 4 (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2005).

²¹ Glending Olson, "The Profits of Pleasure," 281–83.

²² Klaus Schwind, "Komisch," 332–84; here 333; see also Christian Janentzky, "Über Tragik, Komik und Humor," *Jahrbuch des Freien Deutschen Hochstifts* 36 (1940): 3–51; here 23.

brutality of the Lappenhausen peasants ultimately lead to the decimation of the entire village, with only the exception of the male protagonist Bertschi Triefnas, who subsequently withdraws into the Black Forest without having learned any significant lesson from the horrendous slaughter. We laugh about them nevertheless, although the grotesqueness of their military bragging and aggressive dealings with their neighbors, particularly during the final marriage episode, make us rather cringe.²³

As Klaus Schwind notes, “Im Komischen werden für die Wahrnehmung inkongruente Kontexte über zwei- oder mehrwertige Bezüge auf eine ungewohnte Weise überraschend miteinander kombiniert, so daß plötzlich eine Durchlässigkeit zwischen diesen Kontexten aufscheint” (333; In the comical situation contexts become surprisingly incongruent for the perception of double or multiple references, which illuminates a transparency between these contexts). Those who laugh about someone or something remove themselves from the communicative configuration and turn into observers, but often they create a new community of those who are privy to the irony or satire expressed by the laughter. However, the comical attributes or characteristics do not automatically turn against the individuals who are laughed even if the attempt might be to damage or hurt them (unless in slapstick humor); otherwise inherent sympathy might destroy the tendency to perceive the comical.²⁴

Dieter Hörhammer defines the emergence of humor by means of referring to people who begin to laugh when they try to understand the meaning of an experience, drawing from cognitive associations, but are suddenly disrupted in that process and confronted with an unexpected context. Laughter then compensates for the loss of orientation. However, Hörhammer also admits that laughter might, or might not be, a sign of recognition, and that laughing might not be always associated with a comical situation. As one question, which was contained in an Interrogatory for Lechery published at the Synod of Rodez in 1289, indicates, laughter could also constitute a concrete strategy to create a community, or to establish connection with other people; here in an erotic, sexual context:

²³ Stephanie Hagen, *Heinrich Wittenwilers ‘Ring’ – ein ästhetisches Vexierbild: Studien zur Struktur des Komischen*. Literatur – Imagination – Realität. Anglistische, germanistische, romanistische Studien, 45 (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag, 2008), 220–21, emphasizes, above all, the author’s perception of his world as having turned topsy-turvy, in a grotesque transformation of all traditional norms and values. She observes elements of horrified amusement, the perception of a profound crisis affecting the world, and the absence of the Horatian principle of “delectare et prodesse,” all resulting from a loss of wisdom, a pervasive profanation, and the carnevalesque transformation of society.

²⁴ Klaus Schwind, “Komisch,” 333; see also Karlheinz Stierle, “Komik der Lebenswelt und Komik der Komödie,” *Das Komische*, ed. Wolfgang Preisendanz and Rainer Warning. Poetik und Hermeneutik, 7 (Munich: Fink, 1976), 372.

"Have you ever laughed or sang [sic] or gestured towards a woman or she [towards] you with the intention of committing that sin?"²⁵

Hence, we truly face a most complex facet of human existence subsuming a vast variety of causes and conditions, and combining joy and anger, fear and hope, all in one. This is perhaps best captured by Miguel Cervantes Saavedra (1547–1616) in the protagonist of his famous *Don Quijote* (1605/1615), a literary masterpiece that has exerted timeless influence and provided enormous inspiration, particularly because of its witticism, satire, and irrespective laughter.²⁶ As Harold Bloom wisely ruminates: "Yet how sly and subtle is the presence of Cervantes? At its most hilarious, *Don Quixote* is immensely somber. Shakespeare again is the illuminating analogue: Hamlet at his most melancholic will not cease his punning or his gallows humor, and Falstaff's boundless wit is tormented by intimations of rejections. Just as Shakespeare wrote in no genre, *Don Quixote* is tragedy as well as comedy."²⁷

Ancient and medieval thinkers normally attributed laughter only to the lower ranks of people and to simple, rural life, hence to the world of comedy, viewing it primarily negatively and as something condemnable (if they were Christians) in reference to the Biblical word in Luke 6, 25: "Woe to you who are full now, / for you will be hungry. / Woe to you who are laughing now, / for you will mourn and weep."²⁸ Nevertheless, there is promise for true laughter, in Heaven, of course, and this just a few lines before, also in Luke: "Blessed are you who weep now, / for you will laugh" (Luke 6, 21). In the Old Testament laughter erupts more than once, for instance, when Abraham is told that his wife Sarah will conceive: "Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said to himself, 'Can a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Can Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?'" (Genesis 17:17). Once Sarah herself has overheard the announcement, she "laughed to herself, saying, 'After I have grown old, and my husband is old, shall I have pleasure'" (Genesis 18: 12). Somewhat irritated, God Himself complains to

²⁵ Quoted from Pierre J. Payer, *Sex and the New Medieval Literature of Confession, 1150–1300*. Studies and Texts, 163. Mediaeval Law and Theology, 1 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2009), 212.

²⁶ James Iffland, *De fiestas y aguafiestas: risa, locura e ideología en Cervantes y Avellaneda*. Biblioteca áurea hispánica, 7 (Madrid: Iberoamericana; Frankfurt a. M.: Vervuert, 1999); John Jay Allen, "Smiles and Laughter in Don Quixote," *Comparative Literature Studies – Urbana* 43.4 (2006): 515–31. See also the contributions to *International Don Quixote*, ed. Theo D'haen and Reindert Dhondt. Textet. Studies in Comparative Literature, 57 (Amsterdam and New York: Editions Rodopi, 2009).

²⁷ Harold Bloom, "Introduction: Don Quixote, Sancho Panza, and Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra," Miguel de Cervantes, *Don Quixote*. A New Translation by Edith Grossman (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2003), xix–xxxv; here xxii–xxiii.

²⁸ The Biblical texts are quoted from *The Holy Bible from the New Revised Standard Version Bible* (1989); here from the online version at: <http://bible.thelineberrys.com/BIBLE.HTM> (last accessed on Jan. 30, 2010).

Abraham that Sarah has laughed, and the latter tries to deny it, but the Almighty retorts: "'Oh yes, you did laugh'" (Genesis 18:15). This uncanny (because holy) laughter seems best interpreted as an expression of the human incapacity to grasp fully the grace and power of the Godhead; yet the Latter knows it all, and so also understands the nature of human weakness, reconfirming what He has witnessed, Sarah's laughter.²⁹ As a side note, it also deserves to be mentioned that this passage, and in particular Sarah's laughter in the various scenes, attracted long-term interest and was commented on throughout the Middle Ages, as documented by the so-called *Ménagier of Paris* in his household book for his wife (ca. 1400) who confirmed that God's great love for Abraham and Sarah found human reflection in her laughter: "Et pour certain toutes gens qui oyent de ce parler peuvent bien croire et penser que Dieu ama moult Abraham et Sarre aussi, quant il leur fist si belle grace" ("Assuredly, all the people who heard about this knew and believed that God loved Abraham and Sarah dearly when He granted them such a fine favor.")³⁰

If we then fast-forward to Christ's passion, we come to another monumental scene of laughter; here the mocking of Christ by Pilate's soldiers. In Halliwell's words, "At the most basic level the situation manifests the aggressive ridicule of an individual by a crowd, a 'classic' pattern of the social focusing of laughter on a spotlighted victim."³¹ A careful perusal of the Biblical text would uncover many passages where the dialectical nature of the Godhead comes to the surface, especially when He is seen within a human-like relationship with man.³²

²⁹ There are numerous, certainly many more references to 'laughter' in the Bible than commonly assumed, such as in Psalm 59, then in Ecclesiastes 3, 4, and then many times we come across phrases such as 'joy,' or 'rejoice.' See under 'laugh,' 'laughed,' 'laugheth,' 'laughing,' and 'laughter' in the "Concordance of the 12,856 words in the King James Version of the Bible," at <http://www.abibleconcordance.com/L085.htm#L04> (last accessed on Jan. 30, 2010). Grotjahn, *Beyond Laughter*, like many others, marvels at the many instances of laughter in ancient Greek literature (*Iliad* and *Odyssey*), and expresses his astonishment at the dearth of laughter in the Bible, only to cite immediately a whole series of explicit examples contradicting his view, 25–31.

³⁰ *Le Menagier de Paris*, ed. Georgine E. Brereton and Janet M. Ferrier, with a Foreword by Beryl Smalley (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1981), 61. For the English trans., see *The Good Wife's Guide: Le Ménagier de Paris. A Medieval Household Book*. Trans., with Critical Introduction, by Gina L. Greco and Christine M. Rose (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2009), 97.

³¹ Halliwell, *Greek Laughter*, 472. He also adds that this scene includes sadism and, in general, a form of military humor, "providing the soldiers with a temporary escape from the rigours of obedient discipline and allowing them to give vent to pent-up anti-authoritarian (if also, perhaps, all-too-habitual brutal) feelings" (ibid.). He also lists other examples of laughter (implied and explicit) in the New Testament, 475–79. See also Jeannine Horowitz and Sophie Menache, *L'Humour en chaire: Le Rire dans l'Eglise médiévale*. Histoire et Société, 28 (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1994).

³² Lothar Steiger, "Humor," *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, vol. XV (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1986), 696–701, identifies numerous passages both in the Old and the New Testament that illustrate how much the Biblical authors depict either God Father or Christ as an individual characterized by humor; see Gen. 11:7; Matt: 8:8–9; 15:28. For fascinating parallels with Islamic concepts of God laughing, see the contribution to this volume by Livnat Holzman.

Of course, ancient classical authors such as Plato and Aristotle embraced laughter as a typical element of human life (the animal that laughs). Laughing then allowed the individual to find some compensation for all the hardship in life or to see reality through a different lens. In the world of rhetoric, laughter assumes an important role, allowing one side to fend off the attacks by the other carried out in a serious mood with wit and the facetious. When the opponent operates with jokes and laughter, one has to counteract the earnest.³³ In other words, laughter in this context proves to be a deeply social phenomenon and mostly characterizes group behavior and group responses to transgressions, shortcomings, and changes of all sorts.³⁴ When Clarice in the Middle English *Floris and Blauncheflur* suddenly finds herself face to face with Floris who had jumped out of the flower basket, assuming that she was his beloved Blauncheflur, and shrieks in fear and surprise, many of the other maids rush into her room to protect their friend from the presumed danger. But in the meantime Clarice has realized who the young man must be, that is, Blauncheflur's ami, and she resorts to a smart explanation, slyly admitting that a butterfly frightened her out of her wits. The maidens respond with laughter, or "glee," as the text says in ms. E: "þe maydons þerof hadden glee, / And turned hem, and lete hur be" (775–76), and in ms. C the emphasis on laughter is even stronger: "þis oþer lo₃en I hadde gleo" (477).³⁵

But when we carefully browse through high-medieval courtly romances, we find many passages where the protagonist or a secondary figure simply laughs out loud because a situation or object proves to be something very different than expected.³⁶ In yet another context, we discover numerous examples of the comic pertaining to food and eating, as Sarah Gordon recognized: "Culinary comedy works in romance as a contrast chiefly to conventions such as the commonplace of opening feast in the Arthurian court. It is against this idealized and conventional backdrop of the familiar Arthurian feast that comedic treatment of everyday life and bodily functions begins to appear. Later-thirteenth-century poets reevaluate the traditional Arthurian dining scene and guest-host relations, setting them against less courtly, less traditional episodes involving eating."³⁷

³³ Klaus Schwind, "Komisch," 340–01. Surprisingly, he then skips over the Middle Ages altogether and turns to the seventeenth century when many new theories regarding the comical emerged.

³⁴ Fabio Ceccarelli, *Sorriso e riso: Saggio di antropologia biosociale*. Einaudi Paperbacks, 185 (Turin: Einaudi, 1988); see also John Morreall, *Taking Laughter Seriously* (Albany: State University of New York, 1983).

³⁵ *Floris and Blauncheflur: A Middle English Romance* ed. with introduction, notes and glossary by Franciscus Catharina de Vries (Groningen: V. R. B., 1966).

³⁶ One of many examples would be the anonymous *Reinfrid von Braunschweig*, ed. Karl Bartsch (1871; Hildesheim, Zürich, and New York: Olms, 1997), 21238–39: "der fürste rîch erlachtet / dô er diu mære reht bevant" (the prince began to laugh loudly when he learned the full story [about a deceptive image]).

³⁷ Sarah Gordon, "Culinary Comedy in French Arthurian Romance," *Medievalia et Humanistica*. New Series, 30 (2004): 15–31; here 17–18.

Other protagonists laugh once a danger is over and they can relate their adventure and their ability to deceive an opponent.³⁸ Tristan, for instance, in Gottfried von Straßburg's eponymous romance, regales his uncle and lord with the delightful tale of how he had managed to trick the Irish queen to let him depart before the completion of the contracted year, pretending that a loving wife was waiting for him, despairing over his long absence. In fact, the entire court seems to enjoy the account, laughing communally because their most dangerous enemy, the Irish queen, had healed Tristan through her personal care, without ever having found out his true identity. The courtiers express their amazement and wonder, and then also laugh about the entire report, both as a relief of their previous tension and as medium for their contempt of the queen from whose subjugation they have finally been freed.³⁹

The options to explore specific functions and angles of laughter, particularly in the Middle Ages and the early modern age, almost seem endless, although, or perhaps particularly because, leading intellectuals in the Christian Church voiced such vehement protests against and criticism of laughter, not to mention peals of laughter. In the heroic (?) poem *Kudrun* (ca. 1230–1250), when the court festivities have reached their high point and everyone is enjoying him/herself, this finds its expression in communal laughter: “die liute begunden lachen allez über al” (53, 2; the people began to laugh everywhere).⁴⁰ Much later, once *Kudrun* is already engaged to King Herwic, King Hartmuot arrives at her court and tries to woo her, which subsequently leads to a catastrophic development affecting her entire country and herself.

When *Kudrun* learns from Hartmuot's messengers about the implied military threat of a deadly attack if she does not comply with his wishes, she haughtily laughs about this, as she sees it, foolish presumption: “des erlachte diu vil wol getâne” (771, 4; the love lady laughed about that). However, this laughter will come back with a vengeance to her in the subsequent events during which she will

³⁸ See, for instance, the contributions to this volume by Judith Hagen and Daniel F. Pigg.

³⁹ Gottfried von Strassburg, *Tristan*. Nach dem Text von Friedrich Ranke neu herausgegeben, ins Neuhochdeutsche übersetzt, mit einem Stellenkommentar und einem Kommentar von Rüdiger Krohn (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1980), 8237–47. For a solid introduction, now see Tomas Tomasek, *Gottfried von Straßburg* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2007). There are 32 passages in total where the term ‘laughing’ is mentioned, see the online Middle High German dictionary at: <http://www.mhdbdb.sbg.ac.at:8000/mhdbdb/App?action=TextQueryModule&string=lachen&exts=!&startButton=Start+search&contextSelectListSize=1&contextUnit=1&verticalDetail=3&maxTableSize=100&horizontalDetail=3&nrTextLines=3> (last accessed on Jan. 30, 2010).

⁴⁰ *Kudrun*. Nach der Ausgabe von Karl Bartsch, herausgegeben von Karl Stackmann. Altdeutsche Textbibliothek, 115 (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 2000). Oddly enough, this text was copied only once, and this ca. 300 years later after its original composition, in the so-called *Ambraser Heldenbuch* from ca. 1504–1516; see Stackmann, IX–XI. For a good introduction, see also Marion E. Gibbs and Sidney M. Johnson, *Medieval German Literature: A Companion* (New York and London: Garland, 1997), 399–402.

be violently abducted. Nevertheless, once again jumping forward almost to the end of the poem, we hear her laughing another time after she has learned of her imminent liberation through her brother and her fiancé. To hide the arrival of these messengers and of their army, Kudrun suddenly pretends her willingness to marry Hartmuot, who then prepares the wedding festivities (1284ff.). Kudrun's chambermaids begin to cry when they have to assume that their lady has finally changed her mind and will stay at this foreign court for good, making it impossible for all of them to return home. Realizing their misconception, however, Kudrun breaks out in hearty laughter: "des erlachte Kudrûn diu hêre" (1318, 4; the lady Kudrun laughed about them/or it). Her worst oppressor, Hartmuot's mother, Queen Gêrlint, immediately suspects a double meaning behind that laughter, especially because Kudrun had not laughed for fourteen years during her imprisonment and torture as a washing woman.

This laughter, indeed, proves to be unprecedented and almost uncouth, highly uncharacteristic for the well-bred princess-slave: "Ein teil ûz zûhten lachen si began, / diu in vierzehen jâren freude nie gewan" (1320, 1–2; Almost in contradiction to good manners she, who had never experienced any joy for fourteen years, began to laugh). Not surprisingly, Gêrlint interprets this laughter as an indication that Kudrun has secretly received news about her possible liberation: "ich enweiz wes hât gelachtet Kûdrûn diu <schæne> kûniginne" (1321, 4; I do not know what the beautiful queen [princess] has laughed about). Consequently she warns her son to be on his guard, but he dismisses his mother's alert perception as idle and pointless because he regards women's laughter as meaningless and not worth his attention (1323). Nonetheless, as we will learn only too soon, Kudrun's laughter was prophetic, and Hartmuot will die indeed, and so his father and mother, at their enemies' hands after the liberation has occurred. The poet, to be sure, explicitly underscored the hermeneutic significance of laughter insofar as it reflects inner feelings, character weakness or strength, and also serves as a signal about future events about to happen.

For Konrad Fleck, who rendered the Old French *Floire et Blancheflor* (ca. 1160) into Middle High German (*Flôre und Blanscheflûr*, ca. 1220–1230), laughter represents the highest level of courtly values and joy, especially in women, if they express their happiness in appropriate fashion and under the right circumstances. While he severely criticizes men who abuse women and make them cry, he ardently praises those men who can achieve the opposite goal: "'... swer aber daz gemache / daz ein frouwe lache, / dem müeze ir minne werden teil!'" (463–65; he who manages to make women laugh will be the recipient of their love).⁴¹ Crying

⁴¹ Konrad Fleck, *Flore und Blanscheflur*, ed. Emil Sommer. Bibliothek der gesamten deutschen National-Literatur von der ältesten bis auf die neuere Zeit, 12 (Quedlinburg and Leipzig: Druck und Verlag von Gottfried Basse, 1846); a new edition was recently created, but it is not yet

thus proves to be an unequivocal sign of the moral and ethical decay of courtly society, whereas laughter—the specific kind of laughter is not indicated here, but the poet certainly thinks of a happy, well-meaning, harmonious type of laughter free of sarcasm, satire, or irony—expresses the well-being of the courtly world.⁴²

The evidence concerning laughter provided by the more or less contemporary *Carmina Burana* (ca. 1200–1220/1230) actually speaks a very clear language confirming the great interest in humor, jokes, and various types of mockery, satire, and irony, especially among the learned, whether students or their teachers at the various cathedral schools because laughter reveals and veils at the same time, profiles and obscures, hence serves precisely as an extraordinary heuristic instrument. Apart from those songs determined by moral and satirical approaches, and apart from the love songs in the tradition of courtly love—here not counting the clearly noticeable strategy to undermine the very concept, whether by means of elements of violence (rape) or an artificial game with classical-learned features—the mostly anonymous poets also ventured into the field of drinking and gambling songs.⁴³ Although we also know a few names, all university-trained scholars such as Gautier de Châtillon, Giraldus of Bari, Hugo Primas of Orléans, and the Archpriest, the poets normally took cover behind the mask of anonymity to laugh about their world and to criticize its shortcomings in biting, sarcastic, and even bitter fashion, obviously relying on the comic energy of their songs, drawing their audience into a hilarious, entertaining setting determined by communal laughter that rips away the facade of all authorities.⁴⁴

publicly available, Christine Putzo, “Konrad Fleck, Flore und Blanscheflur. Neuedition und Untersuchungen zu Autor, Text und Überlieferung,” Ph.D. diss. Hamburg 2009. I have not had a chance to consult her work, and was only informed by the author that she submitted her thesis for approval (personal e-mail message, September 8, 2009). For the pan-European dissemination of this narrative, see Elisabeth Frenzel, *Stoffe der Weltliteratur: Ein Lexikon dichtungsgeschichtlicher Längsschnitte* 8th, revised and expanded ed. Kröners Taschenausgabe, 300 (Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner Verlag, 1992), 227–29; Albrecht Classen, “Floire et Blancheflor,” *Encyclopedia of Medieval Literature*, ed. Jay Ruud (New York: Facts on File, 2006), 233–34.

⁴² Siegfried Christoph, “The Language and Culture of Joy,” *Words of Love and Love of Words in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, ed. Albrecht Classen. Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 347 (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2007), 319–33.

⁴³ *Carmina Burana*. Texte und Übertragungen. Mit den Miniaturen aus der Handschrift und einem Aufsatz von Peter und Dorothee Diemer. Ed. Benedikt Konrad Vollmer. Bibliothek des Mittelalters, 13 (Frankfurt a. M.: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1987); see also the English translation by David Parlett, *Selections from the Carmina Burana: A Verse Translation* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England, and New York: Penguin, 1986), and *The Love Songs of the Carmina Burana*, trans. by E. D. Blodgett and Roy Arthur Swanson. Garland Library of Medieval Literature, Series B, 49 (New York and London: Garland, 1987). See also my study “The *Carmina Burana*: a Mirror of Latin and Vernacular Literary Traditions from a Cultural-Historical Perspective: Transgression is the Name of the Game,” online in *Neophilologus* (12–24–09; last accessed on Jan. 30, 2010): <http://www.springerlink.com/openurl.asp?genre=article&id=doi:10.1007/s11061-009-9188-2>.

⁴⁴ Albrecht Classen, “*Carmina Burana*,” *Encyclopedia of Medieval Literature*, ed. Jay Ruud (New York:

As Edwin H. Zeydel notes, "In the drinking and gaming songs there is often almost blasphemous parody of convent rules and of the mass. Bogus tippling and gambling 'masses' are solemnized, and gods like Bacchus and Decius celebrated as though they were truly divine."⁴⁵ But he also alerts us to the serious undertone, which we can often, if not regularly, find in most expressions of humor and laughter, especially in the Middle Ages. In reference to "In illo tempore: Inicium sancti evangelii secundum marcas argenti," Zeydel alerts us that it "serves as a weapon in the moral-satirical struggle against corruption among the upper clergy, against simony and the worship of material things Parody, then, developed into an instrument of satire against Church officials."⁴⁶ Of course, it continues to be a point of debate what 'parody' really implies, and whether we can assume that parody in the Middle Ages was the same as we understand it today.⁴⁷ David Parlett emphasizes the representational function of this song collection and the irreverence of its poets: "Their composers are witty, urbane and charming, with no illusions about their own or their contemporaries' spiritual strengths and fleshly frailties, who find no subject too high or too low for their probing consideration and verbal dexterity."⁴⁸ Of course, the drinking songs in the *Carmina Burana* do not refer to specific scenes of laughter, but they are consistently predicated on hilarious transgression and the poet's implied, yet very concrete invitation to laugh about the poetic jokes, such as:

Meum est propositum in taberna mori,
ubi uina proxima morientis ori;
tunc cantabunt lecius angelorum chori:
"Deus sit propicius isti potatori."⁴⁹

[I have the firm determination to die in the pub,
where the wine jugs are very close to the mouth of those who are dying;
then the choirs of the angels will sing filled with joy,
"May God be merciful to this heavy drinker."]

Just a few stanzas further, the poet emphasizes that his verses would be worth nothing unless he would first have eaten and drunk his fill of wine. At that point,

Facts on File, 2006), 114–15.

⁴⁵ Edwin H. Zeydel, *Vagabond Verse: Secular Latin Poems of the Middle Ages*, trans. with an introduction and commentary (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1966), 25.

⁴⁶ Zeydel, trans., 25–26.

⁴⁷ See the contributions to this volume by Mark Burde, John Sewell, Jean N. Goodrich, and Kyle DiRoberto.

⁴⁸ David Parlett, *Selections from the Carmina Burana: A Verse Translation* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England, and New York: Penguin, 1986), 16–17.

⁴⁹ Here I quote from Vollmann's excellent edition, but see also the online edition at: http://www.hs-augsburg.de/~harsch/Chronologia/Lspost13/CarminaBurana/bur_cpo1.html (last accessed on Jan. 30, 2010).

Tu scis linguas impedire.
titubando solet ire
tua sumens basia;
uerba recte non discernens,
centum putat esse cernens
duo luminaria. (stanza 9)

This kind of laughter and joking was (and still is) rather typical of young people who have not yet completed their educational phase (students), but since all poets certainly were trained by members of the Church (clergy), mostly for future service in the Church, this open and unabashed exploration of transgressions in public and private life (considering the love songs), proves to be a most remarkable demonstration of how little theologians and philosophers were really

in command of public demeanor and how much their stern warnings about proper behavior, which was certainly not supposed to include laughter (loud or quiet), in the long run really expressed the very opposite, that is, the delight in basic human nature, indicating the true extent to which people in the Middle Ages could and did laugh.⁵⁰ Both the bawdy and the irreverent, both satire and irony, and then the ever present willingness to transgress most ethical, moral, religious, and philosophical standards and norms determine many of the songs in the *Carmina Burana*, and they certainly shed important light on the culture of laughter in the medieval world which obviously permeated many more circles and social groups than we have traditionally assumed.⁵¹ The same applies to much of the learned literature, particularly since the eleventh and twelfth centuries, when new learning developed—first Cathedral schools, then the universities—and the students acquired a thorough familiarity with classical Roman literature with its deep sense of satire, irony, and parody.⁵²

For courtly ladies, for instance, loud laughter was regarded as inappropriate and uncultured, perhaps as an expression of lack of self-control and boorishness. The daughter in the famous mother-daughter dialogue poem *Die Winsbeckin* (first half of the thirteenth century) expresses most clearly how much laughter was to be feared as a sign of unwomanly behavior. The poet (gender identity remains uncertain even today) puts into her mouth the significant words: “swelch wîp diu ougen ûf, ze tal, / und über treit als einen bal, / dar under ouch gelachet vil: / diu prîset niht der zûhte ir sal” (A woman who casts her glances everywhere, up and down, and runs around like a ball, and then also laughs much, does not count good manners among her praised blessings).⁵³ I am rather positive that here we

⁵⁰ Moshe Lazar, “*Carmina Erotica, Carmina Iocosa: The Body and the Bawdy in Medieval Love Songs, Poetics of Love in the Middle Ages: Texts and Contexts*,” ed. id. and Norris J. Lacy (Fairfax, VA: George Mason University Press, 1989), 249–76.

⁵¹ See James W. Marchand, “The Bawdy in Wolfram,” *Monatshefte* 69 (1977): 131–49; see also the contributions to *Sexuality in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Times: New Approaches to a Fundamental Cultural-Historical and Literary-Anthropological Theme*, ed. Albrecht Classen. *Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture*, 3 (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), especially by Siegfried Christoph, Sarah Gordon, and Albrecht Classen. The issue here at stake is picked up again by Mark Burde, Jean Goodrich, and Sarah Gordon in their respective contributions to the present volume.

⁵² Ronald Pepin, *Literature of Satire in the Twelfth Century: A Neglected Mediaeval Genre*. *Studies in Mediaeval Literature*, 2 (Lewiston, Queenston, and Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1988), 8–12, emphasizes, above all, the sarcastic criticism of the new schools themselves both from the outside and from within, the criticism of the new courtier class, and the new interest in misogyny as a favorite pastime and rhetorical strategy by the learned authors.

⁵³ “Winsbeckin,” *Winsbeckische Gedichte nebst Tirol und Fridebrant*, ed. Albert Leitzmann. Third, newly rev. ed. by Ingo Reiffenstein. *Altdeutsche Textbibliothek*, 9 (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1962), 50, stanza 8, 4–7; see also *Frauen in der deutschen Literaturgeschichte: Die ersten 800 Jahre. Ein Lesebuch*. Ausgewählt, übersetzt und kommentiert von Albrecht Classen. *Women in German Literature*, 4 (New York, Washington, DC, Baltimore, et al.: Peter Lang, 2000), 71–91.

come across a text composed by an unknown female writer, or at least by a writer who harbored mostly sympathetic feelings toward women at large.⁵⁴ Insofar as the young woman confirms herself that excessive and loud laughter appears as transgressive and lacking in modesty, she formulates broadly conceived notions about behavioral norms as they applied to women at large.⁵⁵

If we take the wide range of so-called *ridicula* (funny stories), *nugae* (trifles in metrical verse), *comediae elegiacae*, and *satyrae* also into consideration, many of them composed already in the eleventh century and then throughout the entire Middle Ages and beyond, such as the work of Marbod of Rennes (*Carmina*),⁵⁶ we begin to fathom the true dimension of everyday life in the premodern world where not everything and everyone was serious and only concerned about the well-being of his or her soul, dreading to the deepest extent one's death. In other words, despite its great impact, medieval *Angst* was not the exclusive factor determining premodern mentality, as pervasive as it might appear at first sight and viewed through a specific lens.⁵⁷

Many times medieval and early-modern narrators describe laughable scenes when they discuss communal events, and they regularly illustrate how much laughter—certainly a kaleidoscopic phenomenon, as we have seen already numerous times, and for which I will provide many more examples in this Introduction—can contribute to the establishment of this very community, whether in mockery or in approval of certain words, actions, or ideas. A wonderful and most delightful example can be found in the anonymous Middle High German verse narrative “Das Gänselein,” extant in six of the major

⁵⁴ Albrecht Classen, *The Power of a Woman's Voice in Medieval and Early Modern Literatures: New Approaches to German and European Women Writers and to Violence Against Women in Premodern Times*. Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture, 1 (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2007), 159–86. Olga V. Trokhimenko, “On the Dignity of Women: The ‘Ethical’ Reading’ of Winsbeckin in mgf 474, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin-Preussischer Kulturbesitz,” *Journal of English and German Philology* 107.4 (2008): 490–505, follows the same approach without knowledge of my own study. But see now also her contribution to the present volume.

⁵⁵ For a parallel text, though composed several decades later, see *The Good Wife's Guide: Le Ménagier de Paris. A Medieval Household Book*. Trans. Gina L. Greco and Christine M. Rose (Ithaca, NY, and London: Cornell University Press, 2009). There we learn: “Gaze four *toises* straight ahead and toward the ground, without looking or glancing at any man or woman to the right or left, or looking up, or in a fickle way casting your gaze about in sundry directions, nor laugh nor stop to speak to anyone on the street” (59).

⁵⁶ For a discussion of late-medieval and early modern *sotties*, hilarious, but often also rather bizarre brief dialogues carried out on the stage, see the contribution to this volume by Lia B. Ross.

⁵⁷ Marc Wolterbeek, *Comic Tales of the Middle Ages: An Anthology and Commentary*. Contributions to the Study of World Literature, 39 (New York, Westport, CT, and London: Greenwood Press, 1991); Alison Williams, *Tricksters and Pranksters: Roguery in French and German Literature of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*. Internationale Forschungen zur Allgemeinen und Vergleichenden Literaturwissenschaft, 49 (Amsterdam and Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 2000); see also the contributions to *Lachgemeinschaften*, ed. Werner Röcke and Hans Rudolf Velten, 2005.

manuscripts containing samples of such *mæren*, all from the fourteenth and fifteenth century. This story originated probably in the world of ancient Indian literature, best represented by the *Barlaam and Josaphat* account that found reception throughout Europe in countless different languages. The narrative about an innocent, naive young man (in our case a young oblate in a [Cistercian?] monastery) who learns about all things in this world only once the abbot is taking him on a business trip and then provides him with the names of all objects and animals, is predicated on the arbitrariness of human language, and for that purpose probably found so much favor by numerous writers throughout time (*Vitaspatrum*, Jacobus de Voragine's *Legenda aurea*, the anonymous Italian *Novellino*, Jacob of Vitry's *Exempla*, etc.).⁵⁸ Ironically, however, the young monk has never seen women and does not even know anything about their existence. The abbot now tries to protect his innocence and calls the wife and daughter of his innkeeper 'geese' (84). Full of surprise about the beauty of these 'farm animals,' the monk exclaims that such geese would be an exceedingly welcome enrichment of the monastery's pasture, to which the two women respond with laughter, though they are rather surprised about the discrepancy between the young man's utter ignorance and physical attractiveness (92–95). But they even doubt his sanity, quietly inquiring with the abbot (96–97), who then explains the curious situation.

The entire situation signals that the women's laughter reveals a certain degree of surprise, even shock, and puzzlement, and yet also an element of delight, if not a sense of having been facetiously ridiculed. For the further development of the narrative it is important to consider that only these two women laugh, both with each other and about the monk, demarcating their gender group identity and distance to a member of the other sex. At any rate, the young woman then utilizes the opportunity and seduces the monk at night, pretending to be a goose that needs some warmth from him, to which he happily complies.

Once the abbot and the monk have returned home, the entire community awaits them eagerly because they are curious to learn about the young oblate's experiences outside in the world, fully aware of his astounding ignorance and naiveté, which he must have displayed to them before. They immediately take him aside and question him about his observations and what he has learned. His

⁵⁸

Novellistik des Mittelalters: Märendichtung, ed., trans., and commentary by Klaus Grubmüller. Bibliothek des Mittelalters, 23 (Frankfurt a. M.: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1996), 1237–42. The original text (based on the manuscript created by the Würzburg cleric and administrator Michael de Leone in his so-called "Hausbuch," today housed in the Universitätsbibliothek München, 2^o Cod. ms. 731, written at ca. 1350 in Würzburg) and a German translation are contained in Grubmüller's edition. For an English translation, see *Erotic Tales of Medieval Germany*. Selected and trans. by Albrecht Classen, with a contribution by Maurice Sprague. And with an edition of Froben Christoph von Zimmern's "Der enttäuschte Liebhaber." *Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies*, 328 (2007; Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2009), 73–76.

responses elicit, as expected, much laughter (193), probably because they prove his foolishness and utter lack of comprehension despite the abbot's efforts at least to name everything to him: "sîn rede was ir aller spil" (199; his words were the butt of their jokes). But the monk demonstrates at least enough smartness not to reveal his adventure with the young 'goose' (195–200), although the outside audience is thereby invited to laugh about the entire set-up because we know through the narrator what has really happened.

This laughter gains in intensity, even without any clues in the text, in the subsequent scene when the abbot begins with the preparations for Christmas and the young oblate suddenly insists that they all should get a 'goose' because this would give them all the greatest possible enjoyment here on earth (214–21). To the same degree that he irritates the abbot with his seemingly foolish comment, as much are we invited to laugh about this revelation because the monk has truly taken the abbot's instruction verbatim, whereas the term 'goose' was in actuality intended only as a metaphor to hide the true identity of women to the innocent monk. Despite the abbot's threats, the monk repeats his request for 'geese' (238–40), but now translates them into culinary delights: "guot unde wolgetan" (240; good and well done), which probably evokes even further laughter.⁵⁹ Ultimately, however, this laughter is not directed against the monk specifically because the narrator defends him as an innocent victim of the abbot's failure to provide him with the proper education and sexual enlightenment (275–79). Laughter erupts, in other words, because the principles of communication have been disregarded and the concept of linguistic arbitrariness has found its full application in the wrong context at the wrong time and with the wrong character. The fact by itself that the abbot called women 'geese' in order to protect the oblate actually leads to the young 'goose's sexual awakening, and hence to the monk's seduction. Only the abbot is to be blamed, and so he is rightfully made the object of laughter, whereas we are obviously invited to sympathize with the monk and the inn-keeper's daughter.

An earlier example for laughter that channels extensive mockery can be found in a thirteenth-century *fabliau* by Henri d'Andeli, "The Lai of Aristotle," which deals with the almost 'classical' topic of *Aristotle and Phyllis*. Here this famous teacher, who is working as a private tutor for Alexander, later called 'the Great,' is made into an utter fool because he reveals his own hypocrisy regarding his admonishments to stay away from women's erotic temptations and to focus on the class materials instead. Readers throughout the Middle Ages enjoyed this *lai* and retold it many times,⁶⁰ and each time at the end the wise, old, but also foolish

⁵⁹ For a discussion of laughter predicated on culinary aspects, especially in the *fabliaux*, see the contributions to this volume by Sarah Gordon, Jean E. Jost, and Gretchen Mieszkowski.

⁶⁰ The theme was also used in the visual arts throughout the Middle Ages, see Yvonne Bleyerveld,

master Aristotle, who had tried to enjoin his young student Alexander not to get distracted from his studies because of a lovely maid in the royal household, becomes himself entangled in the woman's erotic seduction and hence the object of his own disciple's laughter.

The maid had figured that she in her youthful beauty would easily dazzle the old man and prove him to be as gullible about, though much less entitled to, erotic pleasures as the young man. Indeed, while she is walking through the garden outside of Aristotle's window one early morning, picking flowers for a garland, the philosopher looks out of the window and immediately desires to sleep with her. When he approaches her, asking for her favors, she hesitantly agrees, but on the condition that he would allow her to sit on his back and ride on him like on a beast. The old man knows only too well that he is making a fool of himself (332), but he is so much love smitten that he cannot help himself and so submits to all her wishes: "por vous metrai et cors et ame, / vie et honor en aventure" (498–99; For you I will put both body and soul, / Life and honor at stake). But as soon as she has placed the saddle on his back and sat herself on it, Alexander, who has observed the entire scene from a window, being a lustful voyeur,⁶¹ almost dies of laughter: "Qui lui donast trestout l'empire / ne se tenist il pas de rire" (4720–21; Not even if someone had given him the whole empire / Could he have kept from laughing).⁶² Then he calls out, not mincing his words and pouring all his sarcasm over the humiliated philosopher:

"Mestre," dist il, "por Dieu! Que vaut ce?
Je voi molt bien c'on vous chevauche.
Comment! Estes vous forsenez
qui en tel point estes menez?
Vous me feïstes l'autre fois

"De gevaren van vrouwenmacht: Vrouwenlisten als thema in de beeldende kunst en literatuur," *Spiegel Historiae* 37.5 (2002): 212–217; for late-medieval German literary adaptations, see Marija Javor Briski, "Eine Warnung vor dominanten Frauen oder Bejahung der Sinnenlust? Zur Ambivalenz des 'Aristoteles-und-Phyllis-Motivs' als Tragezeichen im Spiegel deutscher Dichtungen des späten Mittelalters," *Amsterdamer Beiträge zur älteren Germanistik* 59 (2004): 37–66.

⁶¹ A. C. Spearing, *The Medieval Poet as Voyeur: Looking and Listening in Medieval Love-Narratives* (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); see also the contributions to *Schaulust: heimliche und verpönte Blicke in Literatur und Kunst*, ed. Ulrich Stadler and Karl Wagner (Paderborn: Fink, 2005); cf., further, Dana E. Stewart, *The Arrow of Love: Optics, Gender, and Subjectivity in Medieval Love Poetry* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, and London: Associated University Presses, 2003).

⁶² *The French Fabliau: B.N. MS. 837*. Ed. and trans. Raymond Eichmann and John DuVal. 2 vols. Garland Library of Medieval Literature, Series A, 16 (New York and London: Garland, 1984), 112–13. The literature on *fabliaux* is very rich; see, most recently, the contributions to *The Old French Fabliaux: Essays on Comedy and Context*, ed. Kristin L. Burr, John F. Moran, and Norris J. Lacy (Jefferson, NC, and London: McFarland & Company, 2008). See also the contributions to this volume by Jean E. Jost and Sarah Gordon.

de li veoir si grant defoiz,
 et or vous a mis en tel point
 qu'il n'a en vous de reson point,
 ainz vous metez a loi de beste." (474–82)

["Master," he said, "for God's sake, what's this?
 I see very well that someone is riding you.
 What? Are you crazy,
 Letting yourself be brought to such a low point?
 The other day you made
 Such a great prohibition against my seeing her,
 And now she's put you in a position
 Where there's no reason in you at all;
 Instead, you act according to the law of beasts."]

Significantly, however, Aristotle, at least in this version, finds an elegant explanation for his humiliation, turning it into a great teaching lesson, demonstrating to everyone how subject men are to female attractiveness and that his student would have to learn from this example that no one is free of folly, especially not when one falls in love (490–502). The king, once he has learned of this story, highly praises the young maid, but approvingly laughs about Aristotle's profound explanation and pardons him: "qu'en riant li rois li pardone" (514; laughingly the king pardoned him). For us this means that even within a very short textual passage different types of laughter can erupt, and each signifies completely different mental approaches to particular situations, reflecting, first, contempt, ridicule, and mockery, then, however, in the figure of the king, wisdom, a free spirit, and understanding of typical male behavior in the presence of an attractive young woman.

Despite countless references to laughter in all of medieval literature, scholars have often thought that the discovery and critical discussion of laughter as an essential part of human life did not begin until the Renaissance.⁶³ Despite the period rubrics, Boccaccio was probably one of the first, with his *Decameron* (ca. 1351), to develop and to elaborate a more comprehensive theory on laughter as a critical aspect in human life, irrespective of social class; instead he regarded it as an important element in all intellectual and cultural activities, but particularly important for its

⁶³ This myth was already debunked by J. S. P. Tatlock, "Mediaeval Laughter," *Speculum* 21.3 (1946): 289–94, although his findings did not have the impact which they really deserved. His article met, however, with great approval by a few of his contemporaries; see Helen Adolf, "On Mediaeval Laughter," 1947. Tatlock's evidence for his thesis, mostly taken from Latin literature composed in medieval England, proves to be fully convincing, though he does not pursue theoretical reflections.

therapeutic effect.⁶⁴ He underscores in the prologue to his famous collection of tales: "In which pleasant novels will be found some passages of love rudely crossed, with other courses of events of which the issues are felicitous, in times as well modern as ancient; from which stories the said ladies, who shall read them, may derive both pleasure from the entertaining matters set forth therein, and also good counsel, in that they may learn what to shun, and likewise what to pursue. Which cannot, I believe, come to pass unless the dumps be banished by diversion of mind."⁶⁵ The key term, "*diletto delle sollazzevoli cose*," clearly signals the author's heightened awareness of the delightful, entertaining, comical nature of his tales that are supposed to instruct and to provide a basis for laughter. Of course, I'd hasten to add, we cannot limit our interpretation of Boccaccio's collection to the comic alone; instead the careful analysis can always detect moral, political, philosophical, ethical, and religious purposes as well. This convolution has invited virtually countless and contradictory interpretations throughout the centuries, but the element of entertainment, hence of laughter, has never been missed as a central one. Robert Hollander offers the following thesis regarding the proper understanding of the *Decameron*:

an exploration of humankind's inability to be governed by, or to govern itself in accord with, traditional morality or to find a harmonious way of living within nature; yet the work does envision humanity's ability to develop an aesthetic expression which is fully capable of examining its own corrupt and unameliorable being.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Hans-Jörg Neuschäfer, *Boccaccio und der Beginn der Novelle: Strukturen der Kurzerzählung auf der Schwelle zwischen Mittelalter und Neuzeit* (Munich: Fink, 1983); Elisabeth Arend, *Lachen und Komik in Giovanni Boccaccios Decameron*. *Analecta Romanica*, 68 (Frankfurt a. M.: Vittorio Klostermann, 2004), 11–2, 178–254. For a wonderful comprehensive interpretation of Boccaccio's *Decameron*, with a focus on linguistic features and communication, see Marilyn Migiel, *A Rhetoric of the Decameron* (Toronto, Buffalo, and London: University of Toronto Press, 2003). On laughing women, see Lisa Renée Perfetti, *Women & Laughter in Medieval Comic Literature* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003); on laughter in the *Decameron* specifically, see Beatrice Jakobs, *Rhetorik des Lachens und Diätetik in Boccaccios Decameron*. *Schriften zur Literaturwissenschaft*, 28 (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2006).

⁶⁵ The text is copied from the online version (Gutenberg Project), by now a bit outdated, but still acceptable for our purposes at: <http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/etext03/thdcm10.txt> (Giovanni Boccaccio, *Decameron*. Faithfully trans. by J. M. Rigg, 2 vols. [London: H. F. Bumpus, 1906]; this translation was reprinted as late as 2006 in a large-print format [Charleston, SC: BiblioBazaar, 2006]); for the Italian original, see, also only, at: <http://www.stg.brown.edu/projects/decameronNew/DecIndex.php?lang=it> (both last accessed on Jan. 30, 2010). For a printed edition of another translation, see *The Decameron by Giovanni Boccaccio*, trans. Richard Aldington (1930; New York: Dell Publishing, 1970), 26.

⁶⁶ Robert Hollander, "The *Decameron* Proem," *The Decameron First Day in Perspective*, ed. Elissa B. Weaver. *Lectura Boccaccii*, 1 (Toronto, Buffalo, and London: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 12–28; here 15. Hollander, however, does not even consider the specific aspect of laughter that permeates the entire narrative framework.

Nevertheless, many of the specifically comical elements in the *Decameron* hark back to very similar ones in literary texts from previous centuries, and so from antiquity, especially Ovid, even if they might not yet have been developed so systematically for a narrative framework. However we might view and understand laughter, whether as an expression of aggression or as a form of delightful entertainment, Boccaccio clearly indicated that the laughter contained in his tales and the laughter triggered by them establishes community among the protagonists, between text and reader, and among the audience at large, allowing them to overcome melancholy and to learn the positive and negative sides of erotic relationships.⁶⁷ After all, the primary purpose of his tale-telling framework aims at entertainment, coupled with a degree of education as well, much in the ancient Horatian tradition of *delectare et prodesse*. Those who can laugh, we might say, will become better lovers and will be able to handle the vagaries and vacillations of life's fortune, will be empowered to go through the many trials and tribulations in a more relaxed, perhaps even philosophical, manner.⁶⁸

But he also emphasizes that his entertaining, laughter producing tales would address women above all because they are much more restricted than men in leading their lives, and hence are considerably more subject to the dangers of melancholy: "If thereby a melancholy bred of amorous desire make entrance into their minds, it is like to tarry there to their sore distress, unless it be dispelled by a change of ideas. Besides which they have much less power to support such a weight than men." This then leads Boccaccio to underscore the significant importance of laughter as a counter-measure to life's many challenges: "I, for the succour and diversion of such of them as love (for others may find sufficient solace in the needle and the spindle and the reel), do intend to recount one hundred Novels or Fables or Parables or Stories, as we may please to call them, which were recounted in ten days by an honourable company of seven ladies and three young men in the time of the late mortal pestilence, as also some canzonets sung by the said ladies for their delectation."⁶⁹

As previous scholars have repeatedly observed, the *Decameron* also provided respite from melancholy and emotional distress. Glending Olson captures this

⁶⁷ Arend, *Lachen und Komik*, 253–54.

⁶⁸ For a congenial, highly refreshing, and innovative reading, with an emphasis on philosophy, see Kurt Flasch, *Vernunft und Vergnügen: Liebesgeschichten aus dem Decameron* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2002), 185–99; here 195: "Die Heiterkeit Boccaccios kommt von der Kunstform ironischer Distanz und artistisch plazierter empirischer Versatzstücke; sie kommt nicht aus dem wirklichen Leben" (Boccaccio's mirth derives from the artistic form of ironic distance and from artistically placed empirical pieces arbitrarily arranged; it does not derive from real life). The latter point, however, seems rather questionable; isn't the very opposite the case?

⁶⁹ Again, the text is copied from the online version (Gutenberg Project) at: <http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/etext03/thdcm10.txt> (last accessed on Jan. 30, 2010). For the print version by Richard Aldington, see 26.

sense most poignantly when he remarks: "The analogy between the *brigata's* movement from distress (*noia*) to a rationally controlled cheerfulness (*allegrezza*) and the intended change in Boccaccio's audience of idle ladies gives to the entire work a large element of the therapeutic." In fact, Boccaccio's comedy with its intended laughter was commonly treated as a remedy against the plague.⁷⁰

Countless other authors, actually even long before him have explored this complex network and set of strategies in their own works, even if they did not develop such a comprehensive theoretical approach as Boccaccio. Nevertheless, we still seem to be struggling with how to come to terms with the comical per se, with laughter, or humor in a critical fashion despite countless philosophical tracts and treatises dealing with this phenomenon.⁷¹ In fact, we could write a whole history of human culture by focusing on laughter, as some scholars have suggested recently.⁷² Indeed, it would make very good sense to identify laughter as a form of discourse, which it certainly is, but we cannot limit ourselves to just one strategic aspect concerning all forms of laughter or humor as they emerge in a myriad of literary genres and artistic manifestations.⁷³

Even the intensity of laughter differs profoundly, ranging from a silent mirth to an uncontrollable peal of laughter which often transgresses behavioral norms; as a result the laughing person may be characterized as boorish, foolish, or even insane, unless there is aggression and hostility involved, often at members of lower social classes (peasants, above all). However, the evaluation of that kind of laughter depends very much on the social and cultural value system in every historical period, so we could easily endeavor to distinguish among laughter, say, in the ancient world, in the early Middle Ages, the late Middle Ages, and so on.⁷⁴

In Renaissance art and literature, for instance, we observe a remarkable spike in the depiction or treatment of the fool and of human folly, which deserved to be

⁷⁰ Olson, "The Profit of Pleasure," 279; see also his *Literature as Recreation*, 198.

⁷¹ Anton C. Zijderveld, *Humor und Gesellschaft: Eine Soziologie des Humors und des Lachens* (1971; Graz, Vienna, and Cologne: Styria, 1976); *Lachen – Gelächter – Lächeln: Reflexionen in 3 Spiegeln*, ed. Dietmar Kamper and Christoph Wolf (Frankfurt a. M.: Syndikat, 1986); Éric Smadja, *Le Rire. Que sais-je*, 2766 (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1993); Elisabeth Arend, "Das Lachen angesichts des Scheiterhaufens: Zum Lachen im *Decameron*," *Komik der Renaissance, Renaissance der Komik*, ed. Barbara Marx et al. (Frankfurt a. M.: Peter Lang, 2000), 1–19. The list of respective studies is legion, particularly because laughter has been recognized by scholars in many disciplines and in many countries as a crucial dimension of human existence.

⁷² Rainer Stollmann, "Zur Kulturgeschichte des Lachens," *Impulse aus der Forschung* 1 (2001): 24–27; Wayne H. Storey, "Parodic Structure in *Alibech and Rustico*: Antecedents and Traditions," *Canadian Journal of Italian Studies* 5 (1982): 163–76; Joachim Suchomski, "Delectatio" und "Utilitas": Ein Beitrag zum Verständnis mittelalterlicher komischer Literatur. *Bibliotheca Germanica*, 18 (Bern and Munich: Francke, 1975).

⁷³ Elisabeth Arend, *Lachen und Komik*, 28–35.

⁷⁴ For an intriguing example of how to grasp the meaning of laughter in an early-medieval text, see the contribution to this volume by Daniel F. Pigg.

laughed at.⁷⁵ But then we would also have to discriminate very carefully among specific textual genres, for instance, or art works where laughter functions in a more pronounced fashion or where comical situations determine the account or the image. We might also want to keep in mind that laughter poignantly reveals certain emotions, as humanist scholars already tried to determine in greater depth.⁷⁶

The famous humanist and apostolic secretary Poggio Bracciolini (1380–1459) irritated and incensed many conservative critics and members of the Church with his irreverent, witty, sarcastic and satirical *Facetiae* which he began to compose at the age of seventy in 1450,⁷⁷ taking multiple swipes at all, including everyone who held authority, power, influence, and enjoyed public esteem by way of exposing their weaknesses and vices, and also by predicating his jokes on sexual, if not pornographic, allusions and intimations. Not surprisingly, despite its sometimes rather dubious character, as some of his vociferous critics opined, his collection quickly attracted great popularity all over Europe, as Poggio observed himself: “they flooded all Italy and overflowed into France, Spain, Germany, England and every other country where Latin was understood.”⁷⁸ Yet the opposition also grew, and the *Facetiae* were eventually placed, upon the order of Pope Paul IV, on the *Index Expurgatorius* of the Catholic Church during the Council of Trent in 1559.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ Yona Pinson, *The Fools' Journey: A Myth of Obsession in Northern Renaissance Art* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), 2: “While in medieval morality, folly held a traditional position in the psychomachic pattern among the vices opposed to Prudence, in northern Renaissance thought, folly was no longer limited to the symbolic moral failing. The new notion of folly . . . became universal, and took, ironically, the leading position that had, in the past, been reserved exclusively for death. However, unlike death, an external menacing entity that presents a definite end for man, folly, according to the new moralistic values, presents an internal and continual threat.”

⁷⁶ Robert Schnepf, “Huarte de San Juan und Suárez: Lachen im spanischen Humanismus und in der Spätscholastik, *Klassische Emotionstheorien: von Plato bis Wittgenstein*, ed. Hilge Landweer and Ursula Renz (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 223–46.

⁷⁷ They were first printed in 1470 by the German printer Georgius Lauer in Rome and in Venice by Christophorus Valdarfer. Subsequently, the *Facetiae* appeared all over Europe in countless reprints. In the sixteenth century many authors, especially in Germany, imitated, translated, or copied Poggio's collection of tales, see Albrecht Classen, *Deutsche Schwankliteratur des 16. Jahrhunderts: Studien zu Martin Montanus, Hans Wilhelm Kirchhof und Michael Lindener*. Koblenz-Landauer Studien zu Geistes-, Kultur- und Bildungswissenschaften, 4 (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2009), 27–28 fn. 87, 37, et passim. According to WorldCat, there were at least 202 printed versions that appeared between 1470 and 1600, many of which contained edited or translated texts. For the role of Poggio in literary-historical terms, see Riccardo Fubini, *Humanism and Secularization: From Petrarch to Valla*. Duke Monographs in Medieval and Renaissance Studies (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).

⁷⁸ <http://www.elfinspell.com/PoggioSecondTitle.html> (last accessed on Jan. 30, 2010). See also *The Facetiae of Giovanni Francesco Bracciolini*. A new trans. by Bernhardt J. Hurwood (New York and London: Award Books/Tandem Books, 1968), 21.

⁷⁹ The entire works of ca. 550 authors and some individual titles were banned, altogether an enormous expression of fear on the side of the Catholic Church of the power of the written and

But Poggio had found his own niche as a comical writer and developed, similarly to Boccaccio, a complex theory about the meaning of laughter. In the preface he emphasizes:

Honestum est enim ac ferme necessarium, certe quod sapientes laudarunt, mentem nostram variis cogitationibus ac molestiis oppressam, recreari quandoque a continuis curis, et eam aliquo iocandi genere ad hilaritatem remissionemque converti. Eloquentiam vero in rebus infimis, vel in his in quibus ad verbum vel facetiae exprimendae sunt, vel aliorum dicta referenda quærere, hominis nimium curiosi esse videtur. Sunt enim quaedam quæ ornatus nequeant describi, cum ita recensenda sint, quemadmodum protulerunt ea hi qui in confabulationibus coniiciuntur.⁸⁰

[It is, indeed, a desirable, I might almost say, a necessary thing, in accordance with the belief of philosophy, to relieve the spirit, burdened by numerous cares, and by jest and banter to refresh it from time to time. It would be out of place, however, to attempt a fine style in such light matters, where the chief concern is to reproduce a witty retort of the truthful saying of another. For in such material ornament becomes a vice, where the author seeks to reproduce the form and spirit of the words, as they came from the mouths of those who spoke them.⁸¹]

On the other hand, Poggio defended himself more specifically, mindful of his particular expertise as a philologist, with a reference to the need to practice the Latin language and to demonstrate that it could be employed even for such rather mundane and entertaining tales:

Modo ipsi eadem ornatus politiusque describant, quod ut faciant exhortor, quo lingua Latina etiam levioribus in rebus hac nostra ætate fiat opulentior. Proderit enim ad eloquentiæ doctrinam ea scribendi exercitatio. Ego quidem experiri volui, an multa quæ Latine dici difficulter existimantur, non absurde scribi posse viderentur, in quibus cum nullus ornatus, nulla amplitudo sermonis adhiberi queat, satis erit ingenio nostro, si non inconcinne omnino videbuntur a me referri.⁸²

[I ask only, however, that those who believe this take these same stories and ornament and refine them, so that the Latin tongue of our age may be enriched even in light things; and the practice of this art will lead to the development of a more eloquent style. For I, myself, in this work sought to make trial to find if many thoughts which were said to be difficult of expression in Latin could nevertheless be treated without absurdity. And since I did not find it possible, for my purpose, to employ a brilliant

printed word, and especially of the comic, of laughter, parody, and satire; see Georges Minois, *Censure et culture sous l'Ancien Régime* ([Paris]: Fayard, 1995); Margaret Bald and Ken Wachsberger, *Literature Suppressed on Religious Grounds*. Rev. ed. (1998; New York: Facts on File, 2006); see also: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Index_Librorum_Prohibitorum (last accessed on Jan. 30, 2010).

⁸⁰ Poggio Bracciolini, *Facezie*, con un saggio di Eugenio Garin, introduzione, traduzione e note di Marcello Ciccuto, testo latino a fronte (Milan: Biblioteca Universale Rizzoli, 1983), 108.

⁸¹ I quote here from the online edition; see above.

⁸² Poggio Bracciolini, *Facezie*, 110.

display of words, I shall be content if I at least give the impression that my tales are not clumsily told.

Whereas laughter operates, according to Arendt, as a primary and fundamental expression of humans, the comical itself might be best defined as the result of a specific kind of perception and interpretation of our environment, which is closely associated with our cultural history.⁸³ In this regard, laughter, if closely examined, not only sheds important light on specific characteristics of our culture, but also determines and defines this very culture, such as in the case of sixteenth-century French literature.⁸⁴ We might have to agree that for laughter itself there has never existed a wide ranging lexicon,⁸⁵ yet this by no means implies that laughter does not carry a multiplicity of meanings, depending on the context, the persons involved, the value system, and the concrete situation. Arendt's definition, however, concerning the difference between laughter and the comical can be employed effectively:

Lachen muss also nicht an Komik gebunden sein. Es lässt sich vielmehr folgendes Verhältnis formulieren: Das Lachen ist zwar der wichtigste Anzeiger des Komischen . . . ist jedoch nicht auf diese Funktion beschränkt. Überspitzt heißt dies, dass es keine Komik ohne impliziertes Lachen gibt, sehr wohl jedoch Lachen ohne Komik.⁸⁶

[Laughter does not have to be associated with the comical. We can rather determine the following correlation: Laughter is always the most important indicator of the comical . . . but it is not limited to this function. To formulate it more poignantly: there is no comical without implied laughter, but there can certainly be laughter without the comical.]

Subsequently Arendt examines the intricate phenomenon of smiles, which carry again a host of further meanings, but suffice it here to emphasize that we are on the right track when we differentiate as much as possible and examine specific cases one by one. This approach will provide a fundamental platform for cultural-historical studies, and this from more or less interdisciplinary perspectives, as they constitute the contributions to the present volume.

Henri Bergson argued that laughter erupts when an individual is confronted by the incongruent which exists in opposition to the norm and what is standard. This laughter, however, is highly dependent, according to Bergson, on "a human

⁸³ Arendt, *Lachen und Komik*, 30–31.

⁸⁴ Arendt, *Lachen und Komik*, 31. See, for instance, Marguerite de Navarre's *Heptaméron*, as discussed by Elizabeth Chesney Zegura in this volume.

⁸⁵ Michael Schlaefer, *Studien zur Ermittlung und Beschreibung des lexikalischen Paradigmas "lachen" im Deutschen*. Germanische Bibliothek. Neue Folge, Reihe 3, Untersuchungen (Heidelberg: Winter, 1987).

⁸⁶ Arendt, *Lachen und Komik*, 34.

manifestation of mechanical inelasticity, or a rigidity of manner, belief, or personality. When the exposure of such inelasticity leads to laughter, two groups are immediately formed: those who laugh and those at whom the laughter is directed. Laughter is thus a form of social criticism or a force for social conformity, in which those who laugh see more or see differently from those who are laughed at."⁸⁷ Joachim Ritter claimed, by contrast, that those who laugh recognize the incongruous and alert us to it, thus inviting it, in a way, to enter the world of the congruent, or normative reality. When we laugh, we undermine and permeate the border between both areas, recognizing that the foolish and vain, the irrelevant and absurd might be found in the normal and relevant as well.⁸⁸

There is, for instance, nothing more destructive than laughter at a pompous person, in a seemingly most serious situation, such as a religious ceremony, or in a violent context. As the proverb goes, "he who laughs last laughs best." There is laughter out of desperation, and laughter as an expression of simple joy; then there is laughter as a signal of power, or as a signal of defeat. In fact, the range of meanings implied with laughter seems almost infinite, which underscores the necessity to investigate the sources most carefully and from as many perspectives as possible. We might want to go so far as to specify laughter as one of the fundamental manners to communicate, in private and in public.

Sigmund Freud had famously claimed in 1905 (*Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*) that the power of jokes rests in their power "to overcome a person's defenses against the content of a witicism, a content that a person might ordinarily resist if it were presented in another form."⁸⁹ In Martin Grotjahn's summary of Freud's findings we read:

Laughter occurs when repressing energy is freed from its static function of keeping something forbidden under repression and away from consciousness. A witticism starts with an aggressive tendency or intent—an insult like, shocking thought. This has to be repressed and disappears into the unconscious like a train into a mountain tunnel. The wit work begins there in the darkness of the unconscious, like the dream work; it disguises the latent aggressive thought skillfully. It combines the disguised aggression with playful pleasure, repressed since childhood and waiting for a chance to be satisfied. After this wit work is accomplished, the witticism reappears at the other end of the tunnel and sees the daylight of consciousness and conscience again. By now

⁸⁷ Here I use the concise summary by Michael Payne, "Comedy," *A Dictionary of Cultural and Critical Theory*, ed. id. (1996; Malden, MA, Oxford, and Melbourne: Blackwell Publishing, 1997), 109–10; here 109.

⁸⁸ Henri Bergson, *Le Rire: Essai sur la signification du comique* (1904; Paris: Quadrigue/Presses Universitaires de France, 1985); Joachim Ritter, "Über das Lachen," id., *Subjektivität: Sechs Aufsätze*. Suhrkamp Taschenbuch, 379 (1940; Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1980); see also the contributions to *Das Komische*, ed. Wolfgang Preisendanz and Rainer Warning. Poetik und Hermeneutik, 7 (Munich: Fink, 1976); Arend, *Lachen und Komik*, 75–76.

⁸⁹ Payne, "Comedy," 109.

it has become acceptable, and the energy originally activated to keep the hostility under repression is freed into laughter. The repressed energy is no longer needed; the shock of freedom of thought and freedom from repression is enjoyed and leads to laughter.⁹⁰

Finally, Northrop Frye suggested in his essay “The Argument of Comedy” — see also his *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957) — two types of comedy, the old one determined by Aristophanes (ca. 446 B.C.E.–ca. 386 B.C.E.); and the new one, fundamentally reflected by Menander (ca. 342 B.C.E.–291 B.C.E.), whose literary principles ultimately influenced Shakespeare and his disciples. The former was based on the idea that social structures never change, though aberrations occur or are brought about occasionally (festivals, jokes, comedies); yet normal order, or traditional life, quickly returns and reestablishes itself. The new comedy, on the other hand, signals that the social order can be changed and severely criticized, especially through laughter, and hence the value of comedy, which then can contribute to a reform, if not revolution, of traditional society.⁹¹

To what extent, however, did people really laugh in the Middle Ages and the early-modern period — and do any of the modern theories touched upon above really address this question? When and where did they laugh? Why did they laugh, and about whom or in what context? As we can easily imagine in light of the previous discussion, raising this question implies that people then were not that much different from us today and that they had plenty of occasions to laugh or to enjoy the comical because of specific constellations, utterances, power relationships, and because of certain prejudices, misogyny, fear, or contempt, for instance.⁹² Nevertheless, to direct the focus of our critical analysis toward that situation also allows us to raise the awareness of how much the study of laughter can shed significant light on the culture, or civilization, of a certain age and people and their psychology. For instance, a number of scholars have even applied the study of laughter and humor to psychology and medical healthcare because laughter always improves a person’s mind, which then can also lead to overall improvement of the rest of the body.⁹³ Not surprisingly, this has already been

⁹⁰ Grotjahn, *Beyond Laughter*, 255–56.

⁹¹ Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (1965; New York: Atheneum, 1969), 43–44. See also Ross Murfin and Supryia M. Ray, *The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms*. Third ed. (1997; Boston and New York: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2009), 70–72.

⁹² Paul G. Ruggiers, *Versions of Medieval Comedy* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1977); Felice Moretti, *La ragione del sorriso e del riso nel Medioevo*. Il grifo / Centro ricerche di storia e arte, Bitonto, 5 (Bari: Edipuglia, 2001); Guy Halsall, *Humour, History and Politics in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Lloyd Bishop, *Comic Literature in France: From the Middle Ages to the Twentieth Century* (New Orleans: University Press of the South, 2004).

⁹³ Robin Andrew Haig, *The Anatomy of Humor: Biopsychosocial and Therapeutic Perspectives*. American

observed in medieval medical treatises and narratives—in the former, perhaps, as facetious irony directed against their own profession, and in the latter, as a biting satirical attack against false authorities.⁹⁴

Although Benedict of Nursia had stipulated in his monastic rules that his monks should avoid laughing as inappropriate behavior in specific contexts, he did not condemn it altogether in principle. And he never said anything about laughter outside the convent walls, which should alert us to the danger of inappropriate generalizations regarding the function of the comical in the Middle Ages. In the chapter on silence, for instance, Benedict emphasizes:

Nam loqui et docere magistrum condecet, tacere et audire discipulum convenit. Et ideo, si qua requirenda sunt a priore, cum omni humilitate et subiectione reverentiae requirantur. Scurrilitates vero vel verba otiosa et risum moventia aeterna clausura in omnibus locis damnamus et ad talia eloquia discipulum aperire os non permittimus.⁹⁵

For it belongeth to the master to speak and to teach; it becometh the disciple to be silent and to listen. If, therefore, anything must be asked of the Superior, let it be asked with all humility and respectful submission. But coarse jests, and idle words or speech provoking laughter, we condemn everywhere to eternal exclusion; and for such speech we do not permit the disciple to open his lips.⁹⁶

In the seventh chapter on humility, Benedict underscores: “Decimus humilitatis gradus est si non sit facilis ac promptus in risu, quia scriptum est: Stultus in risu exultat vocem suam” (59; The tenth degree of humility is, when a monk is not easily moved and quick for laughter, for it is written: ‘The fool exalteth his voice in laughter’” [Sir 21:23]).⁹⁷ Monks are supposed to avoid laughter and behave seriously, according to their status: “Undecimus humilitatis gradus est si, cum loquitur monachus, leniter et sine risu, humiliter cum gravitate vel pauca verba et rationabilia loquatur, et non sit clamosus in voce, sicut scriptum est: Sapiens verbis innotescit paucis” (60–61; The eleventh degree of humility is, that, when a monk

Series in Behavioral Science and Law, 1079 (Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas Publisher, 1988); Vera M. Robinson, *Humor and the Health Profession: The Therapeutic Use of Humor in Health Care*. 2nd ed. (1977; Thorofare, NJ: Slack, 1991); Rod A. Martin, *The Psychology of Humor: An Integrative Approach* (Burlington, MA: Elsevier Academic Publication, 2007); see also the contributions to *Motivation to Humor*, ed. Jacob Levine (New York: Atherton Press, 1969); for general remarks on the comical and laughter, see Jacques Veissid, *Le Comique, le rire et l'humour* (Paris: Lettres du Monde, 1978).

⁹⁴ Sebastian Coxon, *Laughter and Narrative in the Later Middle Ages: German Comic Tales 1350–1525*, *Legenda* (Leeds: Modern Humanities Research Association and Maney Publishing, 2008), 35–36.

⁹⁵ http://www.luisvives.com/servlet/SirveObras/jlv/02580516454693584321157/p0000001.htm#I_8_ (last accessed on Jan. 30, 2010).

⁹⁶ Chapter VI: Of Silence; here quoted from the online edition of the English translation at: <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/benedict/rule2/files/rule2.html#ch54> (last accessed on Jan. 30, 2010).

⁹⁷ http://www.luisvives.com/servlet/SirveObras/jlv/02580516454693584321157/p0000001.htm#I_8_ (last accessed on Jan. 30, 2010).

speaketh, he speak gently and without laughter, humbly and with gravity, with few and sensible words, and that he be not loud of voice”⁹⁸ However, we might have to exert considerable caution in the interpretation of how Benedict addressed the issue of “risus” in specific terms. He does not reject laughter outright, on the contrary. First of all, he recognizes that people tend to laugh, yet he observes that some go overboard and make fools of themselves. Second, he specifies laughter only in the context of monastic life, and, even more importantly, he does not condemn it completely and for everyone. Instead, he recognizes that people, even once they have joined a convent, still display interest in mirth and light entertainment, as otherwise his focus on the problem of laughing within the quiet context of the monastery would not have played such an important role.

As is so often the case, whether we examine expressions of anger, fear, or happiness (laughter), espousing the research method underlying the history of mentality, we are quickly in a solid position to gain deeper insight into the value system and the ‘household’ of emotions determining a society. Those like Benedict, who voice criticism of and try to impose a ban on certain behavior, such as laughter, reveal more about that phenomenon than they might have intended, especially because laughter reflects upon society at large, being predicated on communication and social interaction.⁹⁹ Most significantly, we would badly misread the world of the medieval church if we entirely divorced it from laughter, despite the specific statements by Benedict and many others.¹⁰⁰

One of the greatest authorities in the Middle Ages, Thomas Aquinas, in his *Summa Theologica* (written between 1265 and 1274),¹⁰¹ specifically addressed this issue and supported play and laughter, if done innocently and without evil intent, as follows:

Quies animae est delectatio, ut supra habitum est, cum de passionibus ageretur. Et ideo oportet remedium contra fatigationem animalem adhibere per aliquam

⁹⁸ For the Latin version, see <http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/benedict.html> (last accessed on Jan. 30, 2010).

⁹⁹ Marcella Tarozzi Goldsmith, *Nonrepresentational Forms of the Comic: Humor, Irony, and Jokes*. American University Studies. Series V: Philosophy, 117 (New York, San Francisco, Bern, et al.: Peter Lang, 1991), 6–7.

¹⁰⁰ Jeannine Horowitz and Sophia Menach, *L’Humour en chaire*, 22–53; Ingvild Sælid Gilhus, *Laughing Gods, Weeping Virgins: Laughter in the History of Religion* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), ch. 5, 78–101, refers to the great theoretical discussions by Thomas Aquinas on the meaning of laughter as a means to relax the soul (*eutrapelia*), in his *Summa Theologica*, qu. 168, art. 2–4; here 79. But she mostly examines the Feast of Fools, Carnival, and religious plays. Cf. also Charles Mazour, “La Dérision dans les mystères médiévaux,” *Rire des dieux*. Études rassemblées par Dominique Bertrand et Véronique Gély-Ghedira (Clermon-Ferrand: Presses Universitaires Blaise Pascal, 2000), 73–83.

¹⁰¹ For an excellent overview and summary, see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Summa_Theologica (last accessed on Jan. 30, 2010).

delectationem, intermissa intentione ad insistendum studio rationis. Sicut in collationibus patrum legitur quod beatus Evangelista Ioannes, cum quidam scandalizarentur quod eum cum suis discipulis ludentem invenerunt, dicitur mandasse uni eorum, qui arcum gerebat, ut sagittam traheret. Quod cum pluries fecisset, quaesivit utrum hoc continue facere posset. Qui respondit quod, si hoc continue faceret, arcus frangeretur. Unde beatus Ioannes subintulit quod similiter animus hominis frangeretur, si nunquam a sua intentione relaxaretur.¹⁰²

[Consequently, the remedy for weariness of soul must needs consist in the application of some pleasure, by slackening the tension of the reason's study. Thus in the Conferences of the Fathers xxiv, 21, it is related of Blessed John the Evangelist, that when some people were scandalized on finding him playing together with his disciples, he is said to have told one of them who carried a bow to shoot an arrow. And when the latter had done this several times, he asked him whether he could do it indefinitely, and the man answered that if he continued doing it, the bow would break. Whence the Blessed John drew the inference that in like manner man's mind would break if its tension were never relaxed.

Further, as Aquinas reasons,

Ergo his uti interdum ad sapientem et virtuosum pertinet. Philosophus etiam ponit virtutem eutrapeliae circa ludos, quam nos possumus dicere iucunditatem . . . Huiusmodi autem secundum regulam rationis ordinantur. Habitus autem secundum rationem operans est virtus moralis. Et ideo circa ludos potest esse aliqua virtus, quam philosophus eutrapeliam nominat. Et dicitur aliquis eutrapelus a bona versione, quia scilicet bene convertit aliqua dicta vel facta in solatium. Et inquantum per hanc virtutem homo refrenatur ab immoderantia ludorum, sub modestia continetur..

[Therefore there can be a virtue about games. The Philosopher gives it the name of wittiness ({eutrapelia}), and a man is said to be pleasant through having a happy turn* of mind, whereby he gives his words and deeds a cheerful turn: and inasmuch as this virtue restrains a man from immoderate fun, it is comprised under modesty. (*{Eutrapelia} is derived from {trepein} = 'to turn')].¹⁰³

In Article 4 Aquinas goes even one step further and emphasizes the great need of mirth, or laughter, as the glue that holds human beings together and facilitates communication. In clear contrast to many theologians before him, he regards the lack of mirth as a vice and justifies this as follows:

Et ideo tales vitiosi sunt, et dicuntur duri et agrestes, ut philosophus dicit, in IV Ethic. Sed quia ludus est utilis propter delectationem et quietem; delectatio autem et quies

¹⁰² Here quoted from: <http://www.corpusthomicum.org/sth3155.html> (last accessed on Jan. 30, 2010).

¹⁰³ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Qu. 168, art. 2: Whether there can be a virtue about games?; here cited from the online English translation at: http://www.ccel.org/ccel/aquinas/summa.SS_Q168_A2.html (last accessed on Jan. 30, 2010).

non propter se quaeruntur in humana vita, sed propter operationem, ut dicitur in X Ethic., defectus ludi minus est vitiosus quam ludi superexcessus. Unde philosophus dicit, in IX Ethic., quod pauci amici propter delectationem sunt habendi, quia parum de delectatione sufficit ad vitam, quasi pro condimento; sicut parum de sale sufficit in cibo.

[Now a man who is without mirth, not only is lacking in playful speech, but is also burdensome to others, since he is deaf to the moderate mirth of others. Consequently they are vicious, and are said to be boorish or rude, as the Philosopher states (Ethic. iv, 8.

Since, however, mirth is useful for the sake of the rest and pleasures it affords; and since, in human life, pleasure and rest are not in quest for their own sake, but for the sake of operation, as stated in Ethic. x, 6, it follows that “lack of mirth is less sinful than excess thereof.” Hence the Philosopher says (Ethic. ix, 10): “We should make few friends for the sake of pleasure, since but little sweetness suffices to season life, just as little salt suffices for our meat.”]¹⁰⁴

Before we continue with our theoretical ruminations, let us turn to a concrete case to illustrate the issues at stake more dramatically. A most intriguing example of implied laughter can be found, for instance, in the famous poem “Under der linden” (L. 39, 11) by the Middle High German poet Walther von der Vogelweide (fl. ca. 1190–ca. 1220).¹⁰⁵ This beautiful variant of a pastourelle is well known and has attracted much research, but a quick summary may be useful before we begin. A young woman sings about her love experience one day when she goes out to the meadow to meet her lover who has already prepared a bed of flowers and grass for them. She expresses her great delight about how tenderly he welcomed and treated her, but she now also formulates a deep sense of shame and embarrassment, hoping that her secret affair might not be divulged. Only a little nightingale observed the two lovers, but the female voice expects it to be trustworthy and loyal: “daz mac wol getriuwe sîn” (40, 18; IV, 9; it will probably be loyal; or, more loosely translated: it will not give us away).¹⁰⁶

The critical, and for us most important, statement, however, appears in the third stanza when she reflects upon the love bed where they enjoyed their time together. Although she ardently desires that this wonderful erotic experience will remain undiscovered, she also addresses her audience, pointing out the reddishness of her lips (“seht, wie rôet mir ist der munt” [39, 28; II, 9]), and unexpectedly transforming

¹⁰⁴ http://www.ccel.org/ccel/aquinas/summa.SS_Q168_A4.html (last accessed on Jan. 30, 2010).

¹⁰⁵ Walther von der Vogelweide, *Leich, Lieder, Sangsprüche*. 14th completely newly ed. by Christoph Cormeau (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1996); here song no. 16 (“L. 39, 11” refers to the old counting system established by the original editor Karl Lachmann).

¹⁰⁶ The latest critical treatment of this song was offered by Susanne Köbele, “Ironie und Fiktion in Walthers Minnelyrik,” *Fiktion und Fiktionalität in den Literaturen des Mittelalters: Jan-Dirk Müller zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Ursula Peters and Rainer Warning (Munich: Fink, 2009), 289–317.

the audience into immediate witnesses. Moreover, referring to the bed of flowers, she knows only too well that everyone who passes by that location will quickly understand what has happened there because her head has left a clear imprint on the flowers. Those, however, who observe that, and then understand the entire situation, would chuckle quietly by themselves: “des wirt noch gelachtet / inneclîche” (40, 4–5; III, 4–5; people are still laughing happily about it). The use of the adjective “inneclîche” conveys a sense of privacy and also support for the lovers, since all those who pass by would express a sense of understanding, if not happiness because the female singer—still a male projection—imagines a utopian situation for all future lovers. This laughter, however, would be close to the concept of “Lächeln” (smile) as discussed by Arend, that is, not a loud, rude, or hateful laughter; instead it seems to express a degree of intimacy and understanding because this happy love situation appeals to all people who accept and believe in that kind of erotic meeting outside in delightful nature near the forest, but still in the open of a pleasant meadow.

In other words, Walther here projects a truly important situation in which two young lovers experience the dream many others would like to enjoy as well, but these observers who pass by that site later are not jealous; instead they laugh about the welcome opportunity of being entitled to have a chance to assume the position of a voyeur, so to speak, and they delight in the imagination provoked by the left-over bed of flowers. This then triggers their intimate laughter, which indirectly creates a community of those who approve of this happy love affair, outside of society, based on mutual respect and affection.¹⁰⁷ Susanne Köbele now observes: “In Walthers *Lindenlied* setzt Ironie ein artifizielles Spiel mit Zeichen- und Referenzebenen in Gang, über das recht genau beschreibbar wird, worin die komplexe Fiktionsironie, die durchgängige ironische Konstruktion dieses Liedes besteht” (In Walther’s *Lindenlied* [Song of the Linden Tree] irony initiates an artistic game with the levels of signs and references, through which it becomes quite easy to describe what constitutes the complex irony of fiction, or the pervasive ironic

¹⁰⁷ A. C. Spearing, “The Medieval Poet as Voyeur,” *The Old Daunce: Love, Friendship, Sex, and Marriage in the Medieval World*, ed. Robert R. Edwards and Stephen Spector (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1991), 57–86. He does not, however, consider the intriguing element of laughing voyeurs. Heike Sievert, *Studien zur Liebeslyrik Walthers von der Vogelweide*. Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik, 506 (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1990), 93–106, offers a most sensible reading of this poem, but she ignores this very important line referring to people happily laughing about the site of the love-making. Other scholars also seem to ignore this significant element in their interpretation of this truly famous love poem; see Gerhard Hahn, “Walthers Minnesang,” Horst Brunner, Gerhard Hahn, Ulrich Müller, and Franz Viktor Spechtler, *Walther von der Vogelweide: Epoche – Werk – Wirkung*. Arbeitsbücher zur Literaturgeschichte (Munich: Beck, 1996), 74–134; here 106–07. See also Achim Masser, “Zu den sogenannten ‘Mädchenliedern’ Walthers von der Vogelweide,” *Wirkendes Wort* 39 (1989): 3–15.

construction of this song).¹⁰⁸ We can certainly subscribe to this analysis, but we still cannot forget that this irony is strongly supported by actual, though silent, laughter, which, in a way, creates a community of people who firmly believe in the value of courtly, but truly fulfilled love.

In the Middle English version of *Floris and Blancheflur*—a branch of a huge pan-European literary tree of related narratives—once Floris has related to the Admiral/Emir how he had succeeded in making his way to his beloved by tricking the guard, the court company breaks out in scornful laughter: “Alle þes opere lowe peruore” (ms. C, v. 776), which creates an important distance between the court and the outside world, populated by secondary figures, such as the guard, inn-keepers, merchants, and the like. Nevertheless, this laughter also reveals the extent to which individuals are easily subject to material temptations and can thus break or switch their oath of loyalty. Even the best noblemen would be subject to this danger, whereas true lovers emerge as the most powerful and forceful individuals in society.

Let us explore another example, this one from the middle of the fifteenth century, by an unknown author, though we are given, as far as we can tell, the name of the historical editor of the anthology, Antoine de la Salle. In the French *Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles* we come across numerous examples of the typical late-medieval narrative (perhaps already belonging to the Renaissance) in which erotic relationships, marital problems, disloyalty, and love affairs, as well as foolish behavior, ridiculous ideas, and the like, are addressed, and often predicated on the comic.¹⁰⁹ No doubt, this anthology of facetious narratives is very much predicated on the model developed already by Boccaccio with his *Decameron*. Antoine de la Salle had composed similar works before the *Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles*, and in the fiftieth novella he is identified as the author of this tale. But all this remains doubtful, as is the question of whether the collection was supposed to entertain the Burgundian court, or some other noble audience. It was created sometime after 1453 and 1467, although the only surviving manuscript dates it as 1432, which must have been a scribal error for specific reasons that do not need to be addressed here. The *Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles* were first printed in 1486 and ca. 1495, and many times thereafter.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ Susanne Köbele, “Ironie und Fiktion in Walthers Minnelyrik,” 296.

¹⁰⁹ Armine Kotin Mortimer, *The Narrative Imagination: Comic Tales by Philippe de Vigneulles*. Studies in Romance Languages, 18 (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1977); David A. Fein, *Displacements of Power: Readings of the Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles* (Lanham, MD, New York, and Oxford: University Press of America, 2003), focuses on a handful of individual tales and discusses them in detail. He observes that sexuality, betrayal, and politics play some of the strongest roles in the entire collection.

¹¹⁰ Here I use the English translation by Robert B. Douglas: *One Hundred Merrie and Delightsome*

In the twenty-seventh story a married woman invites her lover to visit her at night, without yet knowing how to get rid of her husband at the crucial moment. Luckily, there happens to be a suitcase at the end of her bed, which arouses his curiosity. He wonders about the bag's small size, which makes it unfit to contain her long dresses. The ensuing debate results in a wager as to whether he himself would fit into the suitcase, which we might have to read also metaphorically insofar as he replaces her dresses. After the clothes have been removed, he places himself inside, fitting quite snugly. When he confirms that he has lost the wager, his wife and the chambermaids close and lock the suitcase, and then, laughingly and jokingly, carry it away to a remote room. None of his protests achieve the desired result, so he has to spend the entire night in this unpleasant position, to the great surprise of the lover who arrives shortly thereafter. He and the wife enjoy the night together most pleasantly without being bothered by anyone.

Once the young man has left in the morning, the lady returns to the suitcase but skillfully pretends to be completely surprised to find her poor husband inside, blaming the maids for having failed to follow through with her command to release him from his small prison. At first the cuckolded man voices his intention to get his revenge against the maids, but when they arrive, laughing cheerfully about their alleged trick to get even with him for some assumed wrongful behavior, they channel all his anger away from them and quickly appease him. Interestingly, despite his long suffering, the victim cannot uphold his angry mien and even joins their laughter, which turns into a communal act through which all anger and frustration disappear: "all the women came into the room, and laughed so loudly and so heartily that they could not say a word for a long time; and Monsieur, who was going to do such wonders, when he saw them laugh to such a degree, had not the heart to interfere with them." In fact, he even thanks the maids quite sarcastically for their kind behavior toward him during the night, but they know how to retort, reminding him of all the trouble and worries that he had caused them for a long time.

The entire scene concludes with both sides promising to prepare clothes for each other as a reward, though the women continue to laugh about him even during the subsequent mass because they have to think about his involuntary imprisonment and the fact that the lady could cuckold him so easily: "And you may imagine that during the Mass there was more than one giggle when they remembered that

Stories (Paris: Charles Carrington 1899), cited from the online version at: <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/18575/18575-h/18575-h.htm> (last accessed on Jan. 30, 2010). The commentary by Peter Amelung in the German translation by Alfred Semerau (Vienna: Buchgemeinschaft Donauland, 1965), offers a good overview. For a recent critical edition, see *Les Cent nouvelles nouvelles*, ed. Pacifico Massimi. Texte inédit, publié, traduit et présenté par Juliette Desjardins Daude. Les Classiques de l'Humanisme, 29 (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2008).

Monsieur, whilst he was in the chest (though he did not know it himself), had been registered in the book which has no name.”

The laughter proves to be double-edged, complex, irreverent, but not evil or aggressive, though certainly determined by a deep sense of *Schadenfreude*. The lady has obviously profited the most from the entire set-up since she could enjoy the love affair without her husband ever finding out what happened behind his back. But he does not demonstrate any significant impact on his own position in life since he remains happily ignorant and continues to trust and love his wife. The maids have gained their lady's additional respect through their most skillful handling of the situation in the morning, diverting his possible suspicion away from their mistress to themselves, thus closely collaborating with the lady to create a cover for her love affair. The maids seem to laugh honestly, and play far more than only an artificial role in this amazing performance pitting the entire female household against the poor husband. They have been indirect witnesses of the love affair and now relive it in their minds while confronting the cheated lord. Moreover, being laughed at so profusely, he cannot refrain and joins their outburst of laughter as well, reducing the damage to himself considerably because now he can interpret the situation as a minor infraction on the part of the maids, or as a silly and certainly not mean plot to punish him for some unknown harsh behavior against them. Although he confirms that the maids add insult to his injury, he perceives it as a huge joke; hence he cannot counteract or destroy their open display of happiness.¹¹¹

We as the audience know only too well that he was cuckolded, but insofar as the husband joins the public laughter, the actual damage to his honor finds its compensation, especially because he does not turn into an old fool who deserves to be cheated by his wife. Of course, the husband at the end is the butt of the joke, but this does not destroy or belittle him in light of the entire court society because no one finds out the truth behind his wife's scheme with the suitcase, except for the readers/listeners, with whom the author pleads to keep the story a secret, in a manner very similar to the female voice in Walther von der Vogelweide's song.¹¹²

¹¹¹ Judith Bruskin Diner, “Comedy and Courtliness: the Form and Style of ‘Les cent nouvelles nouvelles,’” Ph.D. diss. New York, 1984; see also Luca Pierdominici, *La Bouche et le corps: Images littéraires du quinzième siècle français*. Bibliothèque du XVe siècle, 65 (Paris: Champion, 2003); for source studies, which do not concern us here, see Raphael Zehnder, *Les Modèles latins des Cent nouvelles nouvelles des textes de Poggio Bracciolini, Nicolas de Clamanges, Albrecht von Eyb et Francesco Petrarca et leur adaptation en langue vernaculaire française* (Bern, Vienna, et al.: Peter Lang, 2004).

¹¹² For further studies of the *Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles*, see Roger Dubuis, *Les Cent nouvelles nouvelles et la tradition de la nouvelle en France au Moyen Age* ([Grenoble]: Presses Universitaires de Grenoble, 1973); Margarete Zimmermann, *Vom Hausbuch zur Novelle: didaktische und erzählende Prosa im Frankreich des späten Mittelalters*. *Studia humaniora*, 12 (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1989); David A. Fein, *Displacement of Power: Readings of the Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2003).

Significantly, the audience proves to be complicit in the humorous scheme which operates exceedingly well with its multiple screens, levels of meaning, group behavior, and carefree attitude regarding marital loyalty. Both the lady of the house and her maids know all too well that they have pulled the carpet out from under the husband's feet and are only too aware how they can manipulate him in the future as well because as a female collective they have triumphed over his feeble attempts to maintain his masculine superiority. Intriguingly, we find a most striking reflection upon this type of laughter in the 'superiority theory' developed by Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679), who, in his *Human Nature* (ch. 8, §13, in *English Works*, vol. 4, 1840), offers the following explanation:

There is a passion that has no name; but the sign of it is that distortion of the countenance which we shall call laughter, which is always joy; but what joy, what we think, and wherein we triumph when we laugh, is not hitherto declared by any. That it consists in wit, or, as they call it, in the jest, experience confutes: for men laugh at mischances and indecencies, wherein there lies no wit nor jest at all. And forasmuch as the same thing is no more ridiculous when it grows stale or usual, whatsoever it be that moves laughter, it must be new and unexpected. Men laugh often, especially such as are greedy of applause from every thing they do well, as their own actions performed never so little beyond their own expectations, as also at their own jests . . . Also men laugh at the infirmities of others, by comparison wherewith their own abilities are set off and illustrated.¹¹³

Both in the high and in the late Middle Ages secular writers never faced serious problems or expressed reservations about incorporating specific scenes, motifs, and themes that included the element of laughter. Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, as I have observed already above, even within the strict framework of the Christian Church, laughter could be heard, and no monastic rule could suppress it completely, although Saint John Chrysostom had (ca. 347–407 C.E.) already proclaimed that Christ had never laughed, underscoring the profound value of dignity of an honorable human life aspiring to enter the glory of the divine afterlife. Athanasius praised Anthony for his inner stoic mind that never had to struggle against laughter, an ideal that Sulpicius Severus (ca. 363–ca. 425) also observed in St. Martin (315/316–ca. 395–405).

Nevertheless, even among these great Church authorities there was no complete consensus regarding the relevance and meaning of humor, jests, wit, and the like, as the probing questions of Petrus Comestor (d. ca. 1178) and by Walter Châtillon (ca. 1135–ca. 1204) indicate.¹¹⁴ Already the tenth-century canoness Hrotsvita of

¹¹³ Quoted from *The Philosophy of Laughter and Humor*, ed. John Morreall. SUNY Series in Philosophy (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 19–20.

¹¹⁴ Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. from the German by Willard R. Trask. Bollingen Series, XXXVI (1948; 1953; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 420–22.

Gandersheim composed religious plays—in specific competition with the Roman playwright Terence whose works she regarded as too immoral for her fellow sisters—in which egregious elements of humor, sometimes almost grotesque and unabashed, boldly surface. The play *Dulcitius* contains some of the most interesting elements because the three virgins to be martyred for their steadfast adherence to their Christian faith can observe at one point how the official Dulcitius, who had intended to rape them while they are held in a prison next to the kitchen in preparation for their execution, ends up in the kitchen instead. With his mind confused by God, he mistakes the pots and pans for the women, hugs and kisses them, and thus gains his (sexual?) satisfaction. The three prisoners, perceiving the noise of the clanging and banging next door, discover a hole in the wall, gleefully watch the fool, and laugh about his egregious mistake.¹¹⁵ They act as voyeurs, and we, as the audience, are also entertained through this form of voyeuristic eroticism.¹¹⁶

Going further back, we discover even types of black humor, as exemplified by the accounts of the martyrdom suffered by Laurence and Eulalia.¹¹⁷ As we read about the former in the *Golden Legend* (ca. 1260–1275), he was roasted on a grill, and yet did not feel any pain. In fact, the author Jacob de Voragine has him say at the worst moment to his tormentor, ridiculing all their futile attempts to subdue his spirit by means of hurting his body: “Ecce, miser, assasti unam partem, gira aliam et manduca! Et gratias agens dixit: ‘Gratias ago tibi, domine, quia ianuas tuas ingredi merui!’” (“Look, wretch, you have me well done on one side, turn me over and eat!” And giving thanks, he said: “ I thank you, O Lord, because I have been worthy to pass through your portals!”).¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ For a somewhat radical and feminist reading, see Eva Cescutti, *Hrotsvit und die Männer: Konstruktionen von “Männlichkeit” und “Weiblichkeit in der lateinischen Literatur im Umfeld der Ottonen, eine Fallstudie*. Forschungen zur Geschichte der älteren deutschen Literatur, 23 (Munich: Fink, 1998); Albrecht Classen, “Sex on the Stage in an Early Medieval Convent: Hrotsvita of Gandersheim. A Tenth-Century Convent Playwright’s Successful Struggle Against the Roman Terence,” forthcoming in *Orbis Litterarum*. For Hrotsvit’s works, see Hrotsvit, *Opera omnia*, ed. Walter Berschin. Bibliotheca scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana (Munich: Saur, 2001).

¹¹⁶ For the concept of voyeurism as developed in the Middle Ages, see Anthony C. Spearing, *The Medieval Poet as Voyer: Looking and Listening in Medieval Love-Narratives* (Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

¹¹⁷ Max Wehrli, *Literatur im deutschen Mittelalter: Eine poetologische Einführung* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1984), 166–73; for a global overview, see Armando Bisanti, *Un ventennio di studi su Rosvita di Gandersheim*. Studi. Fondazione Centro Italiano di Studi sull’ Alto Medioevo, 12 (Spoleto: Fondazione Centro Italiano di Studi sull’ Alto Medioevo, 2005); see also the contributions to *Hrotsvit of Gandersheim: Contexts, Identities, Affinities, and Performances*, ed. Phyllis R. Brown and Katharina M. Wilson, and Linda A. McMillin (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004).

¹¹⁸ Iacopo da Varazze, *Legenda aurea con le miniature del codice Ambrosiano C 240 inf*. Teste critico riveduto e commento a cura di Giovanni Paolo Maggioni (Florence: Sisme, Edizioni del Galluzzo; Milan: Bibliotheca Ambrosiana, 2007), 846; for the English, see Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden*

This philopassianism was rather common in the late Middle Ages and reflected the deep concern with the body as the medium to come to terms with human sinfulness and to fight it as the prison of the soul that desired liberation.¹¹⁹ But already beforehand in the same text we observe Saint Laurence smiling at the foolishness of his tormentors, so when Emperor Decius enjoins his soldiers: “‘Viri Romani, audistis demones istum sacrilegum consolantes, qui nec deos colit nec tormenta metuit nec iratos principes expauescit’ Iussitque iterum eum scorpionibus cedi” (844; “Men of Rome, you have heard the demons consoling this blasphemer, who does not worship our gods, does not fear torments, does not quail before angry princes! He ordered him beaten again with scorpions,” 66). The saint knows only too well that God supports him and that all human efforts will be in vain to crush his determination and deep inner Christian faith because his spirit will always prove to be stronger than his flesh: “Subridens autem Laurentius gratias egit et pro astantibus exorauit” (844; “Laurence smiled, gave thanks, and prayed for those who stood by,” 66).

Max Wehrli offers the insightful explanation that all these religious scenes with humorous elements are not directed against God; on the contrary, they invite the divine element to enter the human sphere which is characterized by laughter—a world identified by its corporeality and sinfulness, hence a world where laughter is the appropriate response to transgression and failure, providing freedom from physical constraints.¹²⁰

But there were significant differences, between a form of *laetitia saecularis*, on the one hand, and the *gaudium spirituale* officially tolerated by the Church, which could not deny at least the *risus moderatus*, to combat a generally feared form of depression, the *tristitia*, or *acedia*. On the other end of the spectrum we even hear of a spiritually inspired form of laughter, evident, for instance, in one of Meister Eckhart’s sermons: “rehte ein spiln, ein lachen in dem guoten werk” (really a game, a laughter in the good work); and the reborn person “kriuchet der muoter ûz der schôz und lachet den himelschen vater ane” (he crawls out of the mother’s womb and smiles at the heavenly Father).¹²¹

Legend: Readings on the Saints, trans. by William Granger Ryan. Vol. II (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 67; see also the online version at:

<http://www.aug.edu/augusta/iconography/goldenLegend/lawrence.htm> (last accessed on Jan. 30, 2010).

¹¹⁹ Esther Cohen, “Towards a History of European Physical Sensibility: Pain in the Later Middle Ages,” *Science in Context* 8.2 (1995): 47-74; here 51. See also Martha Easton, “Pain, Torture and Death in the Huntington Library *Legenda aurea*,” *Gender and Holiness: Men, Women and Saints in Late Medieval Europe*, ed. Samantha J. E. Riches and Sarah Salih. Routledge Studies in Medieval Religion and Culture (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 9-64.

¹²⁰ Wehrli, *Literatur im deutschen Mittelalter*, 173.

¹²¹ Quoted from Wehrli, *Literatur im deutschen Mittelalter*, 179. The relevant text passages are quoted there.

At the same time, however, as Wehrli observes, and as we learn from many other sources, medieval laughter could be of a satirical, aggressive, hostile, or disrespectful nature; an expression of the struggle of the various social classes against each other; or, specifically, the contempt felt by the noble class about the lower class. Altogether, as he concludes:

Das Lachen ist nicht nur ein Akt natürlicher, profaner Entspannung und Befreiung (der ja auch nicht sinnlos und sündhaft zu sein braucht); die Vernichtung falscher Ansprüche, die es leistet, kann vielleicht auch einen Weg zum Heil frei machen. Die *Risibilitas* bezeichnet ein Humanum nicht nur im diesseitigen Sinn, sie ist im Guten wie im Bedenklichen ein Kennzeichen des *geschichtlichen* Menschen.¹²²

[Laughing is not only an act of natural, profane relaxation and liberation (which does not necessarily have to be meaningless or sinful); the destruction of false claims, which is brought about by laughter, can possibly also open a path toward salvation. *Risibilitas* signifies a human character not only in a transcendental sense, it is also, both in the positive and the negative, a character trait of man as a historical being.]

Even if lexical references to laughter or the comical seem to be used sparingly in the Middle Ages, it would be erroneous to claim that the condemnation of both aspects by the Church Fathers and many other theologians in later centuries led to their utter disappearance, as we have seen already in a number of cases.¹²³ Both Bernard of Clairvaux and Anselm of Canterbury resorted to humor and explored laughter in their discourse on a wide variety of matters, though regularly associated with man's frailty and sinfulness.¹²⁴ The great interest in the topic of laughter and the rich world of comical literature in the Renaissance and beyond would not be explicable without an extensive foundation already in the Middle Ages. After all, the incessant preaching against laughter and the comical, such as in Benedict of Nursia's monastic rules, solidly confirms that it was directed against insubordination, hence against the common occurrence, or eruption, of laughter in all facets and conditions of human life. We might have good reasons, though, to assume that people in the Middle Ages and the early modern age allowed humor and the comical to come to life much more commonly,¹²⁵ even within the context of the sacred, than we tend to believe because we give too much weight

¹²² Wehrli, *Literatur im deutschen Mittelalter*, 181.

¹²³ Anton Hügli, "Lächerliche," *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, ed. Joachim Ritter † and Karlfried Gründer. Vol. 5 (Basel and Stuttgart: Schwabe & Co. AG, 1980), 1–7; here 2. It is curious how the same author can formulate such a claim (pertaining, however, primarily to the 'ridiculous') and observe the opposite in another major reference work (see above).

¹²⁴ See, for instance, Anselm's epistle no 41; cf. Lothar Steiger, "Humor," 696–701. See also André Derville, "Humour," *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*. Vol. VII (Paris: Beauchesne, 1969), 1188–92.

¹²⁵ See, for instance, the immensely popular genre of late-medieval plays, such as the *Corpus Christi* plays like *The Second Shepards' Play* and *Noah's Ark* where the comic devils all show this merging of comic and sacred. See the contribution to this volume by Jean N. Goodrich.

to the normative texts opposed to all forms of humor and comic and overlook their specific struggle to overcome the disrespectful merriment.¹²⁶ We can no longer uphold the traditional viewpoint that all laughter was a profane force against sacrality per se. As art historians, theater scholars, and literary historians can amply demonstrate, laughter also arose in the middle of the Church in many different contexts and could even lend voice to the *numinosum*.¹²⁷

Whether there was a tendency toward evil, encased in ever growing forms of nasty and aggressive types of satire, ridicule, and poking fun at people, as Werner Röcke has suggested by pointing toward the significant corpus of surprisingly deconstructive and irreverent late-medieval verse narratives (*mæren*) and prose jest narratives (*Schwänke*), seems rather questionable. Focusing primarily on the latter genre, popular in the sixteenth century, he believes that he can recognize a specific tendency toward the dark side of life as the primary intention of humor:

Diese Schwankhelden stehen nicht über den Dingen, sondern führen – im Gegenteil – mitten in ihre Vielfalt und Widersprüchlichkeit hinein. Die gewohnten Formen des Denkens und Handelns verbinden sie oder besser noch: konfrontieren sie mit bislang Ausgegrenztem, Tabuisiertem, Undenkbarem, mit dem Körper, seinen Reaktionen und Obszönitäten; mit dem Häßlichen, Bösen und Teuflischen.¹²⁸

[These protagonists of jest narratives are not free of all contingency; instead they lead into the midst of all variability and contradictoriness. They connect the habitual forms of thinking and acting with, or rather, they confront them with those aspects that had so far been excluded, subject to a taboo, had been unthinkable, and then also confront them with the body, its reactions and obscenities; with the ugly, evil, and the devilish.]

Heavily drawing on Joachim Ritter's theory, Röcke then proceeds to formulate the general claim: "Komik bezieht das Böse, Häßliche, Befremdliche so ein, daß es applikabel wird. Sie resultiert aus dem Kontrast unterschiedlicher Normensysteme und sichert zugleich ihr mögliches Nebeneinander"¹²⁹ (the comical incorporates

¹²⁶ Basilius Steidle, "Das Lachen im alten Mönchstum," *Benediktinische Monatsschrift zur Pflege religiösen und geistigen Lebens* 20 (1938): 271–80; Gerhard Schmitz: ". . . quod rident homines, plorandum est: Der 'Unwert' des Lachens in monastisch geprägten Vorstellungen der Spätantike und des Mittelalters," *Stadtverfassung, Verfassungsstaat, Pressepolitik: Festschrift für Eberhard Naujoks zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Franz Quarthal and Wilfried Setzler (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1980), 3–15; Irvn M. Resnick, "Risus monastica: Laughter and Medieval Monastic Culture," *Revue Bénédictine* 97 (1987): 90–100; Tobias A. Kemper, "Iesus Christus risus noster: Bemerkungen zur Bewertung des Lachens im Mittelalter," *Komik und Sakralität: Aspekte einer ästhetischen Paradoxie in Mittelalter und früher Neuzeit*, ed. Anja Grebe and Nikolaus Staubach. Tradition – Reform – Innovation, 9 (Frankfurt a. M. and New York: Peter Lang, 2005), 16–31.

¹²⁷ See Katja Gvozdeva and Werner Röcke, "Performative Kommunikationsfelder von Sakralität und Gelächter," "risus sacer – sacrum risibile," ed. id., 9–28; here 10–11.

¹²⁸ Werner Röcke, *Die Freude am Bösen: Studien zu einer Poetik des deutschen Schwankromans im Spätmittelalter*. Forschungen zur Geschichte der älteren deutschen Literatur, 6 (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1987), 157.

¹²⁹ Röcke, *Die Freude am Bösen*, 158.

the evil, ugly, foreign in such a way that it becomes applicable. It results from the contrast of diverse normative systems and guarantees, at the same time, their possible existence side by side). Undoubtedly, there are many examples in late-medieval literature, and we can also find some refractions in earlier texts, but it would be truly dangerous to narrow our critical approach to such extreme terms and perspectives. Of course, laughter sometimes aims at criticizing moral failure in order to correct specific types of behavior, and it also expresses admiration for an intelligently strategizing trickster or goliard.

But again, moral issues rarely play such a substantial role in the world of laughter, a point, which, to be fair, Röcke observes as well.¹³⁰ Insofar as he focuses on late-medieval jest narratives and collections thereof, often determined by a central figure who appears in each individual tale, however, he still argues quite forcefully that in the late Middle Ages and beyond the discursive emphasis rested on the treatment of evil, dirt, and the obscene, which hence represented the crucial material framework for the operation of laughter and humor. There is no doubt that we can observe a remarkable increase of interest in transgressive elements in literary works, such as *Till Eulenspiegel*, profoundly predicated on laughter in many different situations, mostly, but not only, by the roguish protagonist;¹³¹ but Röcke's attempt to generalize from those to establish a global cultural-historical perspective might seriously mislead us in our understanding both of the complex field of laughter/comical and public discourse in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.¹³²

Considering the wide range of possible narrative constellations, which also implies a multiplicity of situations where individual characters laugh about others, with each other, ridicule foolish people, or express admiration and/or surprise about a situation, may well question the validity of this rather radical approach.¹³³ Similarly, it seems questionable to argue, as Klaus Grubmüller suggests, that the majority of late-medieval verse narratives are simply predicated on cunning, funny subterfuges, punning, and rhetorical witticism. Of course, there is no doubt that much laughter in medieval literature (including the *fabliaux* and the *novelle*) is created through funny, devious, conflictual and problematic amorous

¹³⁰ Röcke, *Die Freude am Bösen*, 158; he criticizes Joachim Suchomski, 'Delectatio' und 'Utilitas', 1975, for the very same problematic approach, *ibid*.

¹³¹ Albrecht Classen, "Der komische Held Till Eulenspiegel: Didaxe, Unterhaltung, Kritik," *Wirkendes Wort* 42, 1 (1992): 13–33; *id.*, "Transgression and Laughter, the Scatological and the Epistemological: New Insights into the Pranks of Till Eulenspiegel," *Medievalia et Humanistica* 33 (2007): 41–61; *id.*, "Laughter as the Ultimate Epistemological Vehicle in the Hands of Till Eulenspiegel," *Neophilologus* 92 (2008): 417–89.

¹³² Röcke, *Die Freude am Bösen*, 11–18; for contrastive approaches, see Albrecht Classen, "Laughter as the Ultimate Epistemological Vehicle in the Hands of Till Eulenspiegel"; *id.*, *Deutsche Schwankliteratur des 16. Jahrhunderts*.

¹³³ See my own contribution to this volume.

relationships, the duping of husbands, sexual trysts of all kinds, and attempts by the lovers to avoid being detected.¹³⁴

Significantly, Grubmüller quickly corrects his own position, realizing that in a critical analysis many other strategies surface and force us to operate much more carefully with definitions of laughter and the comical. As it turns out, sexuality, for instance, proves to be not the only purpose or basis for laughter evoked through literary discourse. Instead: "Es geht nicht einfach um die Zwänge der Leidenschaft, es geht um brillante Täuschung als intellektuelle Herausforderung"¹³⁵ (The topic is not limited to the control of passions; instead it deals with brilliant deception as an intellectual challenge). Significantly, he then proceeds to uncover new dimensions, emphasizing, for instance, that eroticism and sexuality, oscillating between accepted conventions and equally accepted transgression ("Attraktivität" — I am not sure whether his choice of word is precise enough here), only provide an opportunity to enact an effective undermining of social norms: "List wird vorgeführt als die subversive Seite der Klugheit"¹³⁶ (Cunning is presented as the subversive other side of intelligence). In general, he insists, laughter erupts when borders, limits, or specific values and ideals are transgressed, hence when individuals expose systematic and personal weaknesses, without taking on an extremely aggressive stance, aiming for the destruction of the opponent or the institution.¹³⁷ A good example for this observation would be the highly pervasive anticlericalism that determined much of the public discourse from the late Middle Ages to at least the late sixteenth century.¹³⁸

But laughter also attacked foolish husbands and the institution of marriage at large, in recognition of the problematic nature of arranged marriages in obvious conflict with love and individual happiness.¹³⁹ Moreover, and this may be the biggest problem in all research on humor and laughter, considering the ponderous nature of historical and cultural-historical implications, attempts to ridicule others from a jocose, silly perspective, have always proven to be negligible aspects, as pervasive as they might have been. The contrary is the case, however, since we can really grasp fundamental aspects of human life and society much better through the lens of laughter than heretofore assumed.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁴ Klaus Grubmüller, *Die Ordnung, der Witz und das Chaos: Eine Geschichte der europäischen Novellistik im Mittelalter: Fabliau – Märe – Novelle* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 2006), 137.

¹³⁵ Grubmüller, *Die Ordnung, der Witz*, 138; see also my contribution to this volume.

¹³⁶ Grubmüller, *Die Ordnung, der Witz*, 139.

¹³⁷ Grubmüller, *Die Ordnung, der Witz*, 140.

¹³⁸ *Anticlericalism in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. Peter A. Dykema and Heiko A. Oberman. Studies in Medieval and Reformation Thought, 51 (Leiden and Cologne: Brill, 1993); Silke Tammen, *Manifestationen von Antiklerikalismus in der Kunst des Mittelalters*. Afra akademische Schriften: Kunstwissenschaften (Frankfurt a. M. and Griedel: Afra-Verlag, 1993).

¹³⁹ Albrecht Classen, *Der Liebes- und Ehediskurs vom hohen Mittelalter bis zum frühen 17. Jahrhundert*. Volksliedstudien, 5 (Münster, New York, et al.: Waxmann, 2005).

¹⁴⁰ For a broader discussion of this aspect, see Guy Halsall, *Humour, History and Politics*, 2002, 1–4;

Let us consider, once again, a concrete example that will profile exceedingly well how problematic all global theories regarding laughter might be and how carefully we would have to analyze each individual text in order to gain a truly complex understanding of the reasons behind the comical. This example takes us back to the ninth or early tenth century when a monk, probably in St. Gallen (today Switzerland), composed the *Waltharius* epos in Latin hexameter.¹⁴¹ Without going into any unnecessary details in the current context, this epic describes Waltharius's successful flight from the Hunnish court, although at the end he is threatened by King Gunther and his men. However, Waltharius has taken an extraordinarily effective defensive position and proves to be a superior warrior, so he can kill all of Gunther's men, until only three have survived. In the final, most brutal battle, Waltharius manages to cut off the king's leg, but when he is about to slaughter him, Hagen extends his helmeted head and thus rescues his lord. However, Waltharius's sword breaks when it hits the helmet, which then allows Hagen to strike at him and to cut off his right hand. Nevertheless, undaunted, his opponent pulls another, shorter, sword from his other side and cuts out Hagen's right eye and badly wounds him in his face.¹⁴²

This puts an end to the ferocious fighting, and the three warriors sit down and start chatting with each other, resorting, however, to a grotesque form of humor, which finds hardly any parallels in medieval heroic poetry. With the help of Waltharius's female companion, Hiltgunt, who had escaped together with him from Attila's court, they bandage their wounds and then enter into a dialogue, making fun of each other in a most brutal, but no longer hurtful manner:

see also the contributions to *Humour in Anglo-Saxon Literature*, ed. Jonathan Wilcox (Rochester, NY: D. S. Brewer, 2000); *Laughter Down the Centuries*, vol. III, ed. Siegfried Jäkel, Asko Tomonen, and V.-M. Rissanen (Turku: Turun Yliopisto, 1997); Ross Balzaretti, "Liutprand of Cremona's Sense of Humour," *Humour, History and Politics*, 114–28, emphasizes how much gender identity (in the world of jokes very often male) has a deep impact on the type of humor displayed by an individual, such as Liutprand.

¹⁴¹ *Waltharius: Lateinisch / Deutsch*. Trans. and ed. by Gregor Vogt-Spira. With an appendix: *Waldere: Englisch / Deutsch*, trans. by Ursula Schaefer (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1994). For the Latin text, see also http://www.hs-augsburg.de/~harsch/Chronologia/Lspost10/Waltharius/wal_txt0.html; for the English translation, see <http://www.northvegr.org/lore/waltharius/index.php> (both last accessed on Jan. 30, 2010).

¹⁴² See the seminal study by Wolfram von den Steinen, "Zum 'Waltharius'," *Mittelaltersprachliche Dichtung: Ausgewählte Beiträge zu ihrer Erforschung*, ed. Karl Langosch. Wege der Forschung, CXLIX (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1969), 193–218 (orig. published in *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum* 84 [1952]: 12–32). See also F. B. Parkes, "Irony in 'Waltharius,'" *Modern Language Notes* 89 (1974): 459–65; Wolfgang Haubrichs, *Die Anfänge: Versuche volkssprachiger Schriftlichkeit im frühen Mittelalter (ca. 700–1050/60)*. Geschichte der deutschen Literatur von den Anfängen bis zum Beginn der Neuzeit, I (Frankfurt a. M.: Athenäum, 1988), 167–69.

Post varios pugnae strepitus ictusque tremendos
 Inter pocula scurrili certamine ludunt.
 Francus ait: 'iam dehinc cervos agitabis, amice,
 Quorum de corio wantis sine fine fruaris:
 At dextrum, moneo, tenera lanugine comple,
 Ut causae ignaros palmae sub imagine fallas.
 Wah! sed quid dicis, quod ritum infringere gentis
 Ac dextro femori gladium agglomerare videris
 Uxorique tuae, si quando ea cura subintrat,
 Perverso amplexu circumdabis euge sinistram?
 Iam quid demoror? en posthac tibi quicquid agendum est,
 Laeva manus faciet' . . . (1424–34)

[The Frank says: "Henceforth you will chase the stags, my friend, so that you may enjoy endless gloves made from their hide! But I advise you to stuff your right glove with tender wool so that you can deceive those who do not know with the appearance of a hand. Wah! Well, what will you say since you seem to break the custom of your race by fixing a sword by your right thigh? And, if ever you feel the desire, will you really put your left arm about your wife in a perverse embrace? Now why do I go on? Behold! From now on you must do everything with your left hand!"]

But Waltharius knows how to give tit for tat and responds in an equally reckless manner, ridiculing Hagen for having lost one eye, which would force him to look at his servants sideways. Even eating would cause him problems:

Si venor cervos, carnem vitabis aprinam.
 Ex hoc iam famulis tu suspectando iubebis
 Heroum turbas transversa tuendo salutans.
 Sed fidei memor antiquae tibi consiliabor:
 Iam si quando domum venias laribusque propinques,

Effice lardatam de multra farreque pultam!
 Haec pariter victum tibi conferet atque medelam (1436–42)

[If I shall hunt stags, you will avoid boar meat. Henceforth in fear you will order your servants—greeting the crowds of heroes with a sideways glance. But, mindful of our old pledge, I will give you counsel: Now, when you come home and near your household, make a larded poultice of barley and milk. This will give you both sustenance and healing.]

However, neither one proves to be mortally hurt, and we can actually imagine that they laugh about their funny, rather sarcastic comments, before departing, so to speak, as good friends:

His dictis pactum renovant iterato coactum
 Atque simul regem tollentes valde dolentem
 Imponunt equiti, et sic disiecti redierunt

Franci Wormatiam, patriamque Aquitanus adivit (1443–46)

[This said, they renewed their pact with repeated pledge; and, together lifting up the king, who was in great pain, they put him on his horse; and separated; thus the Franks returned to Worms, and the Aquitanian came to his homeland.]

The epic concludes peacefully, insofar as they all part from each other and return home, Waltharius reaching his own land, Aquitaine, where he subsequently rules over his people for thirty years after having married Hiltgunt. We are not told anything about his future war activities, or whether the loss of his right hand represented a major shortcoming. To be sure, Waltharius maintained his honor and achieved most glorious victory over all those men, including King Gunther, whereas he and Hagen appear as equal in their fighting abilities, so they are fully entitled to their gruesome jests and mocking.¹⁴³

Instead of entering the complex research history concerning this epic, suffice it here to underscore how deliberately the poet resorts to laughter as the most effective way of concluding his epic.¹⁴⁴ Horrible slaughter and violence have determined the entire text, but now, as the last surviving warriors are so badly wounded that they have no chance of continuing the fight, they suddenly sit down together and make jokes about their own bodily injuries. The resulting laughter, though not explicitly expressed, overcomes all tensions and establishes peace. In such a situation often the victim succeeds in turning the situation up-side down and laughs along with the others, probably the most affective way to handle all such challenges because it proves to be so unexpected and disarming.¹⁴⁵ Humility might be one of the most affective tools in evaluating and analyzing people. This finds full confirmation in Hrotsvita von Gandersheim's plays (see above) as well

¹⁴³ There is much research on this intriguing epic, but the element of laughter has not found much interest; see, for instance, Karl Langosch, *"Waltharius": Die Dichtung und die Forschung*. Erträge der Forschung, 21 (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1973); Alf Önnersfors, *Das Waltharius-Epos: Probleme und Hypothesen*. Scripta minora / Kungl. Humanistiska Vetenskaps-samfundet i Lund, 1987/1988, 1 (Stockholm: Almqvist och Wiksell, 1988); Dennis M. Kratz, *Mocking Epic: Waltharius, Alexandreis, and the Problem of Christian Heroism*. Studia humanitatis (Madrid: J. Porrúa Turanzas, 1980); David Townsend, "Ironic Intertextuality and the Reader's Resistance to Heroic Masculinity in the *Waltharius*," *Becoming Male in the Middle Ages*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Bonnie Wheeler. The New Middle Ages (New York and London: Garland, 1997), 67–86; Jan M. Ziolkowski, "Fighting Words: Wordplay and Swordplay in the *Waltharius*," *Germanic Texts and Latin Models: Medieval Reconstructions*, ed. K. E. Olsen, A. Harbus, and T. Hofstra (Louvain: Peeters; 2001), 29–51.

¹⁴⁴ See also the contribution to the present volume by Daniel F. Pigg, who uncovers significant moments of laughter in the Old English *Beowulf* that powerfully distinguish the individual protagonists and shed light on the sense and quality of community in the Danish world.

¹⁴⁵ For a close reading of the conclusion, see Wilhelm Lenz, *Der Ausgang der Dichtung von Walther und Hildegund*. Hermaea, 34 (Halle a. d. S.: Niemeyer, 1939); Victor Millet, *Épica germánica y tradiciones épicas hispánicas, Waltharius y Gaiferos: la leyenda de Walter de Aquitania y su relación con el romance de Gaiferos*. Biblioteca románica hispánica; II; Estudios y ensayos; 410 (Madrid: Gredos, 1998).

as in late-medieval verse narratives and prose narratives (*mæren*, *Schwänke*; see above).

Sometimes laughter, or rather a contemptuous smile, reveals much about our internal thought processes, as we observe, for instance, in the Middle High German *Nibelungenlied* (ca. 1200). In the early part the Burgundian King Gunther woos the Icelandic Queen Brünhild, but he has to compete against her in three challenges which no normal person could even dare to accept. To make matters even worse, the Burgundians have been forced to give up their weapons and feel terribly frightened because the queen seems to be more a she-devil than a regular woman. Gunther, realizing the great danger they are in, now deeply regrets his decision to travel to Iceland to win this monster woman as his wife (stanza 442), and the warrior Dankwart similarly vocalizes his thoughts, expressing his great worries about losing his life at the hand of women (stanza 443). If, however, they still had their weapons in their hands, he would feel much less fear and dread (stanza 444). His brother Hagen echoes this sentiment (stanza 446), which Brünhild overhears. Smilingly, thus expressing her complete sense of superiority and utter contempt for the men's martial yet, at least in her eyes, silly performance, she orders the return of the weapons because she does not fear them at all:

Wol hôrt' diu maget edele, waz der degen sprach.
mit smielendem munde si über ahsel sach:
"nu er dunke sich sô küene, sô traget in ir gewant,
ir vil scharpfen wâfen gebet den recken an die hant." (stanza 447)¹⁴⁶

[The noble lady heard what the hero had said.
With a smile on her lips she looked over her shoulder and said:
"If he regards himself as such a bold person, then bring them their armor,
put their sharp weapons into their hands."¹⁴⁷]

The only other person who ever smiles with such an air of superiority and condescension is Siegfried shortly before his murder at the end of a hunt, not being

¹⁴⁶ *Das Nibelungenlied: Mittelhochdeutsch / Neuhochdeutsch*. Nach dem Text von Karl Bartsch und Helmut de Boor ins Neuhochdeutsche übersetzt und kommentiert von Siegfried Grosse (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1997). See also the edition *Das Nibelungenlied*. Nach der St. Galler Handschrift herausgegeben und erläutert von Hermann Reichert (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2005); here it is stanza 445. There are numerous other passages in Middle High German literature, but the specific use of "smielen" in our context might well be one of the most sarcastic ones. For other examples, see the *Middle High German Conceptual Database* (online at: <http://www.mhdbdb.sbg.ac.at:8000/mhdbdb/App?action=DicSelect> (last accessed on Jan. 30, 2010).

¹⁴⁷ Irmgard Gephart, *Der Zorn der Nibelungen: Rivalität und Rache im "Nibelungenlied"* (Cologne, Weimar, and Vienna: Böhlau, 2005), 56, observes correctly: Ein grundsätzlicher weiblicher Überlegenheitsgestus, bei dem die Waffen zu einer Art Spielzeug und der Held zu einem Kindmann schrumpfen, wird so subtil wie eindeutig in Szene gesetzt" (A fundamental female gesture expressing superiority, through which weapons are reduced to a form of toys and the [male] hero to a child-man, is thus enacted in a subtle but unmistakable fashion).

aware, just like Brünhild, of his imminent death.¹⁴⁸ Brünhild smiles, but she does not know what her immediate future will hold for her. When Siegfried returns with all the slaughtered animals, the huntsmen complain and ask him to keep some prey for them as well: “‘. . . ir tuot uns hiute lære den berc und ouch den walt’” (940, 3; you empty today both hills and the forest). Both flattered and amused, but certainly also fully aware of his triumphal success, Siegfried only smiles without responding in any way: “des begonde smielen der degen küene unde balt” (940, 4; the bold and strong warrior began to smile about it).

By contrast, Gunther and Hagen had laughed out loud about Brünhild when they observed her precaution in having her own servants watch over the chests that are being filled with jewels from the queen’s treasure to be shipped with her to Worms. Before, Dankwart had excessively squandered all her wealth, obviously in order to weaken and to humiliate her (stanzas 515–16). Now, Brünhild tries to regain some of her control, but her future husband and his vassal dismiss her efforts as vain and ridiculous, laughing at her: “Gunthêr und Hagene dar umb lâchen began” (521, 4; Gunther and Hagen began to laugh about it). Whereas before they had been pale with fear, now they know of their renewed strength and are amused by Brünhild’s desperate attempt to hold on to some of her remaining power and wealth.¹⁴⁹

Much later in the course of events, long after Siegfried’s murder and Kriemhild’s second marriage to the Hunnish King Etzel/Attila, she plots revenge and invites all her family for a visit. When the Burgundians actually arrive, the royal couple stands in a window, watching the entire troop of warriors riding in. She expresses joy in general terms, expressing her absolute power as a queen and also her hope that this situation will provide her with the long-sought opportunity to get even with Hagen who had killed her first husband (1717). Her husband, by contrast, a truly high-minded lord who embraces the ideals of courtliness and seemingly knows nothing about his wife’s intention to avenge her profound pain, perceives the Burgundians with great joy and laughs out loud, expressing his delight about their arrival, an honorable event for his own kingdom: “der kunic vriesch ouch diu mære, vor liebe er lachen began” (1716, 4; the king also learned of the news, and out of great joy he began to laugh).

As Kathryn Starkey comments this passage, “Etzel’s laugh—similar to the smiling countenance of Rüdiger upon the arrival of the Burgundians in Pechlarn—signals his peaceful relationship with the visitors. As a conventional gesture of welcome, Etzel’s expression of love reiterates his bond of fealty with the

¹⁴⁸ For similar examples in late-antique history, see the contribution to this volume by Judith Hagen.

¹⁴⁹ See, for instance, Jan-Dirk Müller, *Spielregeln für den Untergang: Die Welt des Nibelungenliedes* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1998), 349.

Burgundians while underlining his status as lord, that is, as the person who is in the position to bestow or withhold fealty."¹⁵⁰

Even when heroes find themselves in battles that threaten their lives, they still find time to laugh. In the *Eckenlied*, for instance, composed sometime in the first half of the thirteenth century, the protagonist Dietrich encounters a hostile knight, Eggenot, who guards the entrance to a cave and is curious about rumors that his lord Ecke had been killed.¹⁵¹ Indeed, Dietrich has already accomplished this task, and he has also defeated Ecke's brother, though he has not killed him and keeps him instead as a vassal. When Eggenot inquires who might have been so strong as to overpower Ecke, he first promises Dietrich safety: "es mag dir hie kain schad gesin" (217, 4; you will not experience any damage). As soon, however, as Dietrich has revealed the truth, Eggenot pronounces that he intends to kill his opponent in return: "' . . . das kostot uwer leben!'" (217, 13; that will cost you your life). Considering his two previous triumphs, however, Dietrich can only laugh at this assumption: "Des lacht der herre Dietherich" (218, 1; Sir Dietrich laughed about it). Moreover, we can be certain that our protagonist will surely gain the upper hand in good time. But what kind of laughter is it? Dietrich does not laugh happily; rather, he finds Eggenot's comment most irritating, insulting, and foolish; hence he perceives the need to subjugate him, and his laughter only initiates the fight to follow soon, which both pursue filled with fury and wrath: "mit grimme su die swert erzugē" (218, 7; furiously they pulled out their swords). In other words; here Dietrich's laughter expresses his profound contempt and complete determination to squash this opponent as well.¹⁵²

But the poet (or one of the poets, since the manuscript versions differ so extensively) also includes a scene where Dietrich laughs out of joy because he encounters his two friends Wolfhart and Hildebrand who are deeply relieved to find Dietrich again, still alive: "der Perner lachen do began; / er sprach: / 'wer hot euch paide / do her getragen in den than?'" (327, 11–13; the man from Bern [=

¹⁵⁰ Kathryn Starkey, "Performative Emotion and the Politics of Gender in the *Nibelungenlied*," *Women and Medieval Epic: Gender, Genre, and the Limits of Epic Masculinity*, ed. Sara S. Poor and Jana K. Schulman (New York and Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 253–71; here 265.

¹⁵¹ *Das Eckenlied: Mittelhochdeutsch / Neuhochdeutsch*. Text, Übersetzung und Kommentar von Francis B. Brévert (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1986); for a historical-critical edition, see *Das Eckenlied: sämtliche Fassungen*, ed. id. Altdeutsche Textbibliothek, 111 (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1999). See also Matthias Meyer, *Die Verfügbarkeit der Fiktion: Interpretationen und poetologische Untersuchungen zum Artusroman und zur aventiurehaften Dietrichepik des 13. Jahrhunderts*. Germanisch-Romanische Monatsschrift, Beiheft, 12 (Heidelberg: Winter, 1994).

¹⁵² As to the element of unfettered violence in the *Eckenlied*, see Harald Haferland, *Mündlichkeit, Gedächtnis und Medialität: Heldendichtung im deutschen Mittelalter* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004), 173–82.

Dietrich] began to laugh. He said: "Who has sent you both into the forest?"). The subsequent events lead to public joy and jubilation, and the heroic conflicts come to an end. Remarkably, then, even within the context of heroic poetry laughter or variants thereof demarcate the feelings and emotional responses, providing inner depth and a psychological profile.¹⁵³

Another aspect of laughter emerges in Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival* (ca. 1205) where the young hero at first displays complete ignorance of how to cope in the courtly world because his mother Herzeloide has kept him deliberately away, raising him as a boorish young man in her forest solitude. When Parzival finally leaves this utopian space and reaches King Arthur's court, he is confused as to how to find the king. Helplessly he turns to the squire Iwanet who quickly realizes that this curious stranger, whom the others have also noticed because of his odd appearance, immediately needs support. Parzival inquires: "ich sihe hie mangan Artûs: / wer sol mich ritter machen?" (Section 147, 22–23; "I notice here so many an Arthur, who is supposed to knight me?"). Iwanet laughs about this silly statement: "Iwânet begunde lachen" (24) because they have not even reached the palace and find themselves only in a throng of knights (and ladies).¹⁵⁴

Later, once the king has knighted him and Parzival is most eager to depart to find the red knight Ither whose armor he hopes to gain as a gift from King Arthur, the young man suddenly comes into view of the courtly lady Cunneware. She has pledged, or has been forced by the circumstances, never to smile again until she perceives the savior of the Grail kingdom, a most significant perspective toward laughter which is thus identified as an epistemological sign of the highest order, almost with theological undertones: "sine sâhe in der den hôhsten prîs / hete od solt erwerben: / si wolt ê sus ersterben" (Section 151, 14–16; until she would see the one who would have earned or would acquire the highest praise; otherwise she was willing to die).¹⁵⁵ Surprisingly, however, in a prophetic manner, she begins to smile as soon as she has espied Parzival: "allez lachen si vermeit, / unz daz der

¹⁵³ For a helpful introduction and overview, see Joachim Heinzle, *Einführung in die mittelhochdeutsche Dietrichepik*, de Gruyter Studienbuch (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1999), 109–27.

¹⁵⁴ Sebastian Coxon, "Laughter and the Process of Civilization in Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*," *Un-Civilizing Processes? Excess and Transgression in German Society and Culture: Perspectives Debating with Norbert Elias*, ed. Mary Fulbrook (Amsterdam and New York: Editions Rodopi, 2007), 17–38.

¹⁵⁵ Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival*. Nach der Ausgabe Karl Lachmanns revidiert und kommentiert von Eberhard Nellmann. Übertragen von Dieter Kühn. Bibliothek des Mittelalters, 8/1 (Frankfurt a. M.: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1994). As an aside, the German translation modifies the text too much and adds numerous modern French terms in order to modernize it in a rather slangy fashion. For recent studies on *Parzival* (in English), see the contributions to *A Companion to Wolfram's Parzival*, ed. Will Hasty. Studies in German Literature, Linguistics, and Culture (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1999).

knappe für si reit: / do erlachte ir minneclîcher munt" (17–19; she avoided all laughter until the squire came riding by her: at that moment she began to smile [laughed her loving lips]).

Of course, this provokes great anger in the court steward Keye, who immediately gives her a hard beating as punishment for this seemingly inappropriate behavior. She could have smiled or laughed many times before when worthy knights had attended the court, whereas designating this boorish young fool as the savior of their world would be tantamount to deep embarrassment and to sending a wrong signal (20–30).¹⁵⁶ But the squire Antanor, who had kept complete silence for the same reason that Cunneware had stopped smiling, now suddenly speaks up, confirming the truth of her designation of Parzival as the future leader. Keye also punishes him harshly, which the narrator condemns severely, and Parzival himself would have liked to propel his javelin against this mean man, though the throng prevents him from doing so, stopping him from killing Keye. Nevertheless, as we know from the subsequent narrative development, Cunneware had laughed for good reason, insofar as Parzival will later rise to the rank of successor to the Grail King Anfortas and thus restore the world of knighthood and chivalry.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁶ Irene Erfen, "Das Lachen der Cunnewäre: Bemerkungen zu Wagners 'Parsifal' und Wolframs 'Parzival'," *Sprachspiel und Lachkultur: Beiträge zur Literatur- und Sprachgeschichte*, Rolf Bräuer zum 60. Geburtstag, ed. Angela Bader et al. Stuttgarter Arbeiten zur Germanistik, 300 (Stuttgart: Heinz, 1994), 69–87; Waltraud Fritsch-Rößler, "Lachen und Schlagen: Reden als Kulturtechnik in Wolframs 'Parzival,'" *Verstehen durch Vernunft: Festschrift für Werner Hoffmann*, ed. Burkhardt Krause. *Philologica Germanica*, 19 (Vienna: Fassbaender, 1997), 75–98. For a critical study of the steward figure Keie in Heinrich von dem Türlin's *Die Crône* (ca. 1220/1230), who cuts an even more ridiculous figure, evoking much laughter, see Christiane Schonert, *Figurenspele: Identität und Rollen Keies in Heinrichs von dem Türlin "Crône"*. *Philologische Studien und Quellen*, 217 (Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 2009). She emphasizes, above all, Keye's role as the mocking person, 90–101 (note: the spelling of his name varies according to the manuscripts).

¹⁵⁷ In many passages of Wolfram's *Parzival* a comical element comes to the surface; in fact, Wolfram can be identified as a deeply comical author, even when he addresses most serious topics, see Sebastian Coxon, "Der Ritter und die Fährmannstochter: Zum schwankhaften Erzählen in Wolframs 'Parzival,'" *Wolfram-Studien XVII: Wolfram von Eschenbach – Bilanzen und Perspektiven. Eichstätt Kolloquium 2000*, ed. Wolfgang Haubrichs, Eckart C. Lutz, and Klaus Ridder (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 2002), 114–35. He does not, however, examine the specific nature of laughter in this famous passage. See the research literature cited here, note 2–5. In his article "do lachete die gote: Zur literarischen Inszenierung des Lachens in der höfischen Epik," *Wolfram-Studien XVIII: Erzähltechnik und Erzählstrategien in der deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters. Saarbrücker Kolloquium 2002*, ed. Wolfgang Haubrichs, Eckart C. Lutz, and Klaus Ridder (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 2004), 189–210, Coxon probes the nature of laughter from a broader perspective, but leaves out Wolfram altogether. See also his "Laughter and the Process of Civilization in Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*," *Uncivilizing Processes? Excess and Transgression in German Society and Culture: Perspectives Debating with Norbert Elias*, ed. Mary Fulbrook. *German Monitor*, 66 (Amsterdam and New York: Editions Rodopi, 2007), 17–38; here 31–32. Moreover, cf. Christoph Huber, "Lachen im höfischen Roman: Zu einigen komplexen Episoden im literarischen Transfer," *Kultureller Austausch und*

Altogether, Wolfram skillfully put to use laughter in a variety of ways, with individuals laughing in surprise (or rather expressing their astonishment) about Parzival's ignorance and boorishness in the splendid context of King Arthur's court, with the squire Iwanet laughing in a rather friendly and supportive manner about Parzival's complete lack of understanding concerning the world of the court, and with Cunneware laughing because she has suddenly recognized the future king in the young man, unconsciously delighted about her epiphany.

Tragically, she has to suffer for it because the irascible court steward Keie badly beats her up, deeply irritated about her impulsive response to the foolish and boorish looking young man, but this laughter is evoked throughout the text as an essential moment when the deeply hidden truth about the future Grail king has been revealed by her.¹⁵⁸ In fact, if we pursued our search further, we would have to deal with numerous other passages in Wolfram's text where people laugh or smile, sometimes in a supportive, and sometimes in a hostile manner, which indicates how important this human expression was for our author since he intended to project a comprehensive *Bildungsroman* (novel about an individual's education and successful growth into adulthood) and also a literary platform for the search of a new world, combining the Arthurian with the Grail dimension.¹⁵⁹

However, almost mindful of Benedict of Nursia's monastic rules, Wolfram also emphasizes close to the end – when Parzival undergoes a religious conversion and spends meditative time with his uncle Trevrizent, indirectly in preparation for his rise to the Grail throne – that these two men hardly ever laughed, almost having assumed the habit of monks themselves: “si wuoschen wûrze und ir krût. / ir munt wart selten lachens lût” (section 486, 3–4; they washed the roots and herbs. They hardly ever laughed). We can certainly agree with Michael Dallapiazza that Wolfram's comic focuses very much on the disparity between sacredness and the mundane, but it would diminish the grandiose literary quality of Wolfram's romance *Parzival* if we were to ignore the extensive range of alternative comic situations and conditions, including puns, satirical allusions, dirty, or sexual, jokes, and the comic that simply establishes distance between the narrator, his figures, and the audience.¹⁶⁰

Literaturgeschichte im Mittelalter, ed. Ingrid Kasten, Werner Paravicini, René Perennec. Beihefte der Francia, 43 (Sigmaringen: Jan Thorbecke Verlag, 1998), 34–58.

¹⁵⁸ See, for instance, Book 135, 16ff.; 151, 11–20; 152, 7–12; 152, 23–29; 158, 26–199, 9; 215, 6–9; 221, 19–25; 304, 16ff.; 305, 305–06.

¹⁵⁹ There are thirty-eight passages with the verb ‘lachen’ (to smile), and the treatment of laughter in other syntactical functions also proves to be very rich; see the *Middle High German Conceptual Database* at:

<http://www.mhdbdb.sbg.ac.at:8000/mhdbdb/App?action=SelectQuotation&c=PZ+3571> (last accessed on Jan. 30, 2010).

¹⁶⁰ Michael Dallapiazza, *Wolfram von Eschenbach: Parzival*. Klassiker-Lektüren, 12 (Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 2009), 141–44. He also points out the jest-like portrayal of Parzival's half-brother

Laughter often signals that a wise person has perceived the whole truth and realized how much everyone has been stuck in an illusion about him/herself and the entire social setting. Merlin in the thirteenth-century romance *Silence* by Heldris of Cornwall (or de Cornuälle) breaks out in almost unstoppable laughter when he is led as a prisoner to the court of King Ris because he observes the various masks that individual members of the court wear, including Silence. But he also foresees the future and can prophesy, which makes him laugh even harder since the others around him obviously do not understand anything about the inner nature of things or people and prove to be utterly deluded.¹⁶¹ However, Merlin resists for a long time all physical threats and efforts to force him to admit the true cause of his laughter. Only when he suddenly faces the death penalty does he finally explain and prove that he was absolutely right in laughing about the various people surrounding him both outside and inside of the court.

At first Merlin observes a peasant carrying a new pair of shoes, and laughs about this sight (6190–95). Later he will reveal that he could foresee the peasant's imminent death, making the purchase of these shoes unnecessary and foolish (6321–23). The next sight is a leper begging for alms near an abbey, which again triggers almost uncontrollable laughter (6202–05). Subsequently, Merlin explains that he had laughed so hard because right under the beggar's feet a large treasure was hidden (6333–37), confirming for him again how blind people turn out to be, not capable of comprehending where the true values are lying. In the next scene a priest is chanting the burial service for a deceased child, while the sorrowful father sheds bitter tears (6212–15), which Merlin finds enormously hilarious. The reason for this turns out to be, as he later reveals, that he realized to what extent the true conditions were just the opposite, without either man knowing that insofar as the dead child had been the priest's, so the mourner should have been happy to have gotten rid of this bastard child as the product of his wife's adultery (6359–65).

When Merlin finally looks at Silence and overhears her conversation with the queen, however; here disregarding an exchange with a nun before, he laughs the hardest (6276–77). The reasons why the king, his wife, the nun, the knight Silence, and he himself were the object of his amazing laughter are then finally divulged, but not before everyone present grows alarmed because they suddenly realize how much Merlin, indeed, knows how to uncover the truth and rips off the mask that everyone seems to wear at court (6497–6505):

“ . . . Cil doi, Silence et la none,

Feirefiz who converts to Christianity because he wants to marry one of the Grail ladies, Repanse de Schoye. As Dallapiazza emphasizes, the parody of the baptism ritual and Feirefiz's love craze cast everything that might be holy or sacrosanct in the light of laughter (143–44).

¹⁶¹ *Silence: A Thirteenth-Century French Romance*. Newly ed. and trans. with intro. and notes by Sarah Roche-Mahdi. *Medieval Texts and Studies*, 10 (East Lansing: Colleagues Press, 1992).

Sont li doi qui gabés nos ont.
 Et nos li doi qui gabé sunt.
 Rois, cele none tient Eufeme.
 Escarnist vos ses dras de feme.
 Rois, or vos ai jo bien garni.
 Silence ra moi escarni
 En wallés dras, c'est vertés fine,
 Si est desos les dras meschine.
 La vesteüre, ele est de malle.
 La nonain, qui n'a soig de halle,
 Bize, ni vent, ki point et giele.
 A vesteüre de femiele.
 Silence qui moult set et valt,
 Bials sire rois, se Dex me salt,
 Ne sai home qui tant soit fors
 Ki le venquist par son effors.
 Et une feme, tendre cose,
 Vos poet honir et set et ose.
 Et c'une feme me ra pris,
 Quele mervelle est se j'en ris,
 Qu'ansdeus nos ont ensi deçut,
 Qu'eles nos ont tel plait esmut
 Comme .xx. .m. ne porent faire.
 Sire, jo ris de cest affaire." (6538–552)

[These two, Silence and the nun,
 are the deceivers;
 you and I are the deceived.
 King, this nun is Eufeme's lover;
 he is deceiving you in woman's dress.
 Now I've spoken plainly enough, King.
 Silence, on the other hand, tricked me
 by dressing like a young man: in truth,
 he is a girl beneath his clothes.
 Only the clothing is masculine.
 The nun, who has no need to fear the scorching sun
 or the north wind's blast that stings and freezes,
 is a woman in clothing only.
 Silence is wise and valiant,
 good Sir King, so help me God,
 I don't know any man, however strong,
 who could have conquered him in combat.
 A woman, a tender little thing,
 knows she can dishonor you and does.
 And it was a woman who captured me.
 Is it any wonder I'm laughing,

when they have deceived both of us like this,
 when they have set a snare for us
 such as twenty thousand men couldn't?
 Sire, I think this is really funny."]

Of course, the full truth comes out, and no one feels like laughing anymore, everyone being afraid of being exposed. Nevertheless, for Merlin the entire set-up at the court just proved too much for him, recognizing masks employed everywhere; hence his shocking outbursts of laughter, but this provided the very basis from which enlightenment can then develop. Without his laughter there would not have been any provocation and rupture. But this way, allegorical nurture wins over allegorical nature, leading to the harmonious and happy outcome of the entire romance. Women's inheritance rights are restituted, the Queen Eufeme and her lover in the mask of a nun are executed, and the King Ris actually marries Silentia—formerly Silentius—thus making everything right that was badly wrong in the world as depicted in this romance.¹⁶²

Of course, laughter determines Merlin's character already much earlier in Geoffrey of Monmouth's probably foundational text in the long history of the Merlin myth, his *Vita Merlini* from ca. 1150, here disregarding likely older Welsh sources, and then all kinds of other possible earlier narratives, perhaps even of Indian origins.¹⁶³ There are numerous references to silly, foolish, meaningless, or everyday laughter that erupts over pedestrian events or trifle objects, such as when Merlin and his friends find apples and all eat them, except for Merlin, half-famished, without realizing, however, that this food robs them of their sanity: "porrexitque michi subito pro munere ridens. / Ergo distribui data poma sodalibus et me / expertem feci quia non suffecit acervus. / Riserunt alii quibus impertita fuerunt / meque vocant largum cupidis quoque faucibus illa / agrediendo vorant et pauca fuisse queruntur" (1411-16; "quickly gathered them and gave them to me, laughing over our unexpected present. I handed the gift of apples round my friends but left myself without any, because the pile was not large enough. Those who had received apples laughed and called me generous. Then they eagerly fell

¹⁶² This romance has been discussed from many sides recently, see, for instance, Suzanne Kocher, "Accusations of Gay and Straight Sexual Transgression in the *Roman de la Violette*," *Discourses on Love, Marriage, and Transgression in Medieval and Early Modern Literature*, ed. Albrecht Classen. Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 278 (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2004), 189–210; Karen Pratt, "Humor in the *Roman de Silence*," *Arthurian Literature* 19 (2003): 87–103. But 'laughter' as such has hardly been the focus of scholarly investigations.

¹⁶³ Geoffrey of Monmouth, *Life of Merlin/Vita Merlini*. Ed. with Introduction, facing translation, textual commentary, name notes index, and translation of the *Lailoken* tales by Basil Clarke (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1973), 12–14; for a comprehensive overview of the history of dissemination of this and other narratives focused on Merlin, see Stephen Knight, *Merlin: Knowledge and Power Through the Ages* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2009).

to and ate them up, complaining that there were so few"). As Merlin realizes, a former mistress had placed these poisoned apples there in the hope to get her revenge from her past lover who had ultimately repulsed her. But this proves to be not a laughing matter, since it amounted to an assassination plot which he escaped just by chance due to his great generosity.

Earlier, however, and that's the scene that will find its parallel in the *Roman de Silence*, among many others, Merlin laughs when he espies the Queen and recognizes, as his laughter indicates, her true nature hidden from King Rodarch view, that is, her having committed adultery: "Iccirco risi quoniam Rodarche fuisti / facto cupandus simul et laudandus eodem, / dum traheres folium modo quod regina capillis / nescia gestabat fieresque fidelio illi / quam fuit illa tibi quando virgulta subivit / quo suus occurrit secumque coivit adulter, dumque supina foret sparsis in crinibus hesit / forte jacens folium quod nescius eripuisti." (286–93; 'The reason I laughed, Rodarch, was that in one and the same act you earned both approval and disapproval. When just now you pulled out the leaf the queen unknowingly had in her hair, you were more faithful to her than she had been to you when she crept into the undergrowth, where her lover met her and lay with her. As she lay there, a leaf fallen by chance caught in her loosened hair. You plucked it out, unknowing.').

Later he is tested by means of a boy dressed up as a girl, and Merlin predicts a threefold death that the young person will suffer, which makes King Rodarch, however, laugh at the improbability (339–40), though the prophecy ultimately comes to be true. Each situation, hence, requires a new approach, and laughter could indicate profound wisdom or utter foolishness.

Interestingly, in Wace's later *Roman de Brut* (1155), only King Aurelius laughs, and he does so out of disbelief regarding Merlin's recommendation to erect Stonehenge with stones which actually no normal man would be able to lift. These he should transport from Ireland, where they had been brought to originally by giants who had carried them from Africa. As Merlin later explains, if people take a bath in water that has washed down the stones, they would quickly recover their health. But the king finds this all rather absurd:

"Merlin," said the kind with laughter,
 "Granting the stones do weigh so much
 that they cannot be moved by man,
 Who will be able to bring them here?—

As if we didn't in this kingdom
 Have stones with quality enough!"

(8051–56)¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁴ Wace, *Le Roman de Brut: The French Book of Brutus*, trans. Arthur Wayne Glowka. *Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies*, 279 (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance

Merlin rejects this criticism and mockery, and alerts the king “That cleverness defeats brute strength [] / Strength is good, but cleverness better. / Cleverness works where brute strength fails” (8058–60). Remarkably, in this context Merlin does not laugh; he is so self-assured and knows that his prophecy is right; hence he does not need and does not want to laugh.

We observe significant, almost dialectic moments of laughter also in the famous but mysterious *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (late fourteenth century, anonymous). Lord Bercilak, who actually turns out to be the Green Knight himself, challenges Gawain, or, more specifically, King Arthur and his court by offering to submit voluntarily to decapitation, if the one bold enough to accept this ‘game’ then reciprocates a year later. In a subsequent scene, and a year later, when Gawain has already arrived at his castle, not knowing that his host and the Green Knight are one and the same person, Bercilak proposes a wager with his guest Gawain, suggesting that each of them should go on a hunt. He himself would chase and kill animals in the real forest, whereas Gawain should stay home and see what kind of prey he might be able to capture, which certainly means Bercilak’s own wife who will indeed enter Gawain’s bedroom for three days and try to seduce him sexually. In fact, metaphorically and literally she chases her victim in close parallel to her husband who each day pursues a different kind of animal, each one representing, in a way, one of Gawain’s character traits and strengths.¹⁶⁵ As part of the wager, the lord of the castle also promises Gawain to designate someone to take him to the Green Chapel in good time to meet that ominous monster, which triggers hearty, communal laughter on the part of our protagonist, obviously as a sign of deep relief and renewed hope: “Penne wat, Gawan ful glad, and gomenly he laȝed: / ‘Now I þonk yow þryuandely þurȝ alle oþer þynge, / Now acheued is my chaunce, I schal at your wyll / Dowelle and elleȝ do quat ȝe demen” (1079–82; “Gawain was very glad then, and gleefully he laughed. / ‘Now I thank you thoroughly above all other things. / Since my quest will be accomplished, as you clearly said, / I shall dwell here and do whatever you deem”).

In other words, Gawain feels a heavy burden lifted from his shoulders that had been determined by a sense of insecurity and helplessness in his search for that

Studies, 2005). See also Knight, *Merlin*, 43–46.

¹⁶⁵ Here I quote from *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight: A Dual-Language Version*, ed. and trans. by William Vantuono. Garland Reference Library of the Humanities, 1265 (New York and London: Garland, 1991). The research literature on this text is legion; see, for instance, Nick Davis, *Stories of Chaos: Reason and Its Displacement in Early Modern English Narrative* (Aldershot, Brookfield, VT, et al.: Ashgate, 1999), 39–73; Francis Ingledew, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight and the Order of the Garter* (Notre Dame: IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006). See also the contributions to *Gawain: a Casebook*, ed. Raymond H. Thompson and Keith Busby. Arthurian Characters and Themes, 8 (New York and London: Routledge, 2006).

ominous green knight whose head he had cut off a year ago. Now, by contrast, he is faced with the mirror reality and suddenly perceives himself as terribly mortal and yet safe for the moment because he has accomplished the first part of the contract. Simultaneously the lord expresses his great joy about the planned game with one of the most outstanding knights in the world, by leaping around and making much noise: “*Þe lorde let for luf lote₃ so myry, / As wy₃ þat wolde of his wyte, ne wyst quat he my₃t*” (1086–87; “As the lord joked merrily, uttering many jests, / Like a man out of his mind to maintain a happy mood).

At a later point, after Gawain has finally met the Green Knight and actually survived the pretend beheading game, if we can call it that, he faces an opponent who simply delights in observing his courage and fearlessness, giving him all the respect that is due to him (2334–40). But Bercilak then reveals the secret operation behind the wager, with his own wife functioning as Gawain’s seductress. In fact, the husband knows everything about the bedroom scenes, including the famous, allegedly life-saving green belt which the knight had kept for himself as the lady’s gift, without handing it over to Bercilak as part of their agreement to exchange everything they would hunt during the day. The Green Knight heaps praise on Gawain for his strong resolve in resisting his wife’s efforts to seduce him, but he also criticizes him for having failed the last test with the green belt. Nevertheless, he forgives him this little infraction because he did not accept the belt due to its material value or as an expression of the lady’s love for him. Instead, Gawain simply loved his own life and did not want to die, a very natural instinct in man: “‘. . . Bot for_{3e} lufed your lyf; þe lasse I yow blame’” (2368; “‘. . . But because you loved your life; thus the less I blame you’”).

Shocked about this revelation, realizing how much he actually clings to life, and embarrassed about his human weakness, Gawain unbuckles the belt and tosses it to Bercilak, admitting his own weakness, unworthy of a knight, blaming himself for having committed a sin, and expressing his deep humility. But his opponent only breaks out in laughter: “*Thenn lo_{3e} þat oþer leude and luflyly sayde: ‘I halde hit hardily hole, þe harme þat I hade. / Pou art confessed so clene, beknownen of þy mysses’*” (2389–91; “Then the proud lord smiled and politely said: / ‘The harm that I had I hold firmly amended; / You have confessed so cleanly, proclaiming your faults, . . .’”).

Gawain then leaves, taking the green belt with him as a gift and as a memento of his shortcoming, which he later openly and explicitly exposes to King Arthur and his court. As he emphasizes, the belt serves him as a symbol of his “harme” (2511; failure), which one might be able to hide, but which one could never make disappear. Of course, everyone energetically denies that Gawain actually demonstrated cowardice, considering the monstrous situation. Once the king has consoled him, they all reintegrate Gawain most respectfully into the community

by way of loud, certainly sympathetic laughter: “Þe kyng comferte₃ þe kny₃t, and alle þe court als / La₃en loude þerat and luflyly acorden / Þat lordes and ladis þat longed to þe Table” (2513–15; “The king and all the court comfort the knight, / Laugh loudly at that, and lovingly agree— / Those lords who belonged to the Round Table, and their ladies—”).

The Green Knight had demonstrated great respect for Gawain, heartily laughing about the wonderful and impressive display of the knight’s sense of honor and shame over such a small infraction. The members of King Arthur’s court laugh because they are relieved to know that Gawain has returned safely and that his public admission of a shortcoming amounted to nothing else but having kept the belt a secret because it seemed to be the long sought after safeguard to survive the deadly beheading. After all, life is most valuable, and Gawain has returned from almost certain death, so the belt, which now becomes a symbol of courtliness and chivalry for every member of the Round Table, represents the intricate nature of human life, of people’s ardent desire to survive, and yet also the need to preserve one’s honor.

Consistently, laughter connects people, establishes community, and expresses respect and happiness in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*; but it also reflects, on a deeper level, the relief that the horrible challenge by the Green Knight was nothing but a challenge, a challenge which even the best among them, Gawain, barely could meet and which could always lead to catastrophe. But that laughter also signals that courtly society has deeply comprehended how much life and death are intertwined, and that the one basically conditions the other, which is shocking enough. In a way, the entire court had been traumatized by the events with the Green Knight, and their final laughter eases all tensions and returns things to normal. Finally, both Bercilak’s laughter and that of the court indicate that the threat of death can be coped with constructively, since honor is more important than a life lived in shame. This laughter also extricates Gawain and the Arthurian court from the web of intrigue and manipulation woven by the old lady at castle Hautdesert (Bercilak), Morgan le Fay. As Nick Davis comments: “Perhaps this move in the narrative implies, among other things, a generic assessment of romance as inherently *involving* voluntary or unwitting male self-subordination to Woman, which is also the typical logic of romance narrative as the lady of the castle has explained it to Gawain a couple of days earlier”¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁶ Nick Davis, *Stories of Chaos*, 59. Cf. also Insung Lee, “The Comic Element in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*: Laughter,” *Medieval English Studies* 7 (1999): 199–221 (in Korean, with English summary); Robert Longworth, “Interpretive Laughter in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*,” *Philological Quarterly* 70.2 (1994): 141–17; Martin Stevens, “Laughter and Game in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*,” *Speculum* 47.1 (1972): 65–78.

In this context one cannot avoid mentioning the great work of Geoffrey Chaucer as well where many of his characters laugh out loudly, chuckle, grimace, or express their mirth, joy, or contempt through a wide range of laughter. Since the narrator of the *Canterbury Tales* (ca. 1400) introduces a whole company of pilgrims on their way to Canterbury, he also has them talk to each other and react to specific words, gestures, or ideas, creating a rich fabric of human relations and communication, which naturally also includes numerous moments of jokes and laughter. The famous Wife of Bath, for instance, stands out as a person of strong and unabashed character: "In felaweship wel koude she laughe and carpe / Of remedies of love she knew perchaunce / For she koude of that art the olde daunce" ("Prologue," 474–76).¹⁶⁷ In the "Knight's Tale," by contrast, nature is said to laugh for joy about the rise of the sun: "And firy Phebus riseth up so brighte, / That al the orient laugheth of the lighte / And with hise stremes dryeth in the greves" (1493–95).¹⁶⁸ But then we encounter a very different discussion of laughter, insofar

¹⁶⁷ Here I quote from the new edition, Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, ed. Robert Boenig and Andrew Taylor (Peterborough, Ontario, Canada, and Buffalo, NY: Broadview Press, 2008) because it is based on the Ellesmere and, where gaps occur, on the Hengwrt manuscript, without trying to be historical-critical, following an artificial stemma.

¹⁶⁸ We find a remarkable parallel to this description of nature laughing in the late thirteenth-century German verse narrative "Der Borte" by Dietrich von der Gletze where a knight bribes a young lady to sleep with him. For a long time she refuses all his material offers, but when he also adds a belt (hence the title) which guarantees the one who wears it public honor, eternal happiness, security from being slain, and safety against burning in fire and drowning in water, she remembers her absent husband who seems to be lacking in self-confidence and hence in social esteem. So she agrees to grant the knight his sexual desire, and nature then responds most joyfully, laughing about the successful development in the knight's wooing: "When the lady lay down, followed by the knight, the trees rustled, the roses laughed heartily, and the birds sang loudly about it Once the game was over, both flowers and grass laughed happily." Quoted from: *Erotic Tales of Medieval Germany*. Selected and trans. by Albrecht Classen, with a contribution by Maurice Sprague. And with an edition of Froben Christoph von Zimmern's "Der enttäuschte Liebhaber." *Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies*, 328 (2007; Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2009), 23. We still do not have a good explanation for nature's joyful response to this love making because it really hurts the lady insofar as they have been observed by a servant who reports it to his lord. The latter feels so distraught that he does not return home from a tournament. The lady waits for two years, then follows her husband, but disguised as a knight, and at the end can demonstrate to him that she did not really intend to cheat on him. Moreover, when he is ready to do anything the other knight might demand in return for one of the magical objects/animals (the belt remains hidden), which the anonymous knight once had given to the lady in return for her love, he is told that the only price for one of them would be sexual gratification, i.e., a homosexual relationship. Surprisingly, the husband is immediately ready to do so, without showing any signs of being homosexually oriented. This then allows the lady to reveal her true identity and to lambaste her husband for his moral and ethical lapse, whereas her own transgression had only served to increase his honor. Perhaps nature had laughed during the garden scene because the anonymous knight got his sexual wish fulfilled, irrespective of all social consequences, which would be of no relevance for nature anyway. For somewhat fruitful discussions of public vs. private laughter, as we encounter it in the genre of the

as even the phenomenon of madness comes forward in an irrational laughter: "Yet saugh I Woodnesse laughyng in his rage, / Armed Complaint, Outhees, and fiers Outrage" (2011–12). Once the knight has completed his tale, which everyone applauds because it proved to be "a noble storie, / And worthy for to be drawn to memorie" ("The Miller's Prologue," 3111–12), the Host "lough and swoor, 'So moot I gon, / This gooth aright! Unbokeled is the male" (3114–15). He is delighted about the success of his idea to entertain the entire company of pilgrims and looks forward to a continued series of tales. His laughter reflects his happy mood, and does not carry any negative sentiments.

Soon enough, we then come across a passage where 'to laugh' serves both as a temporal expression and as an indication of how evil-minded a plan might be to hurt a failed lover. This example is contained in "The Miller's Tale." While Alison has her lover Nicholas with her, the competitor Absolon is outside and receives her cold shoulder. Upon his pleading to grant him at least a kiss, she concocts a devilish strategy to hurt the poor fellow even further, whispering to Nicholas: "'Now hust, and thou shalt laughen al thy fille'" (3722). She extends her naked rear out of the window, which Absolon, not being able to see anything in the dark night, mistakes for her lips, realizing only too quickly, however, the extent to which he has been grossly duped because he feels her pubic hair. The two persons inside do not seem to laugh out loud,¹⁶⁹ but we can imagine how much they must have chuckled over their cunning and fooling the poor man who could only kiss his beloved nether 'lips' — certainly an obscene allusion. However, Absolon quickly gets his revenge, finding a red-hot iron in a blacksmith's forge; and when he asks for a second kiss in return for a ring, Nicholas takes Alison's place, first farting into Absolon's face (3806), but then getting the terrible iron rammed into his rear, which could almost be read as a form of masculine rape.¹⁷⁰

Screaming in pain, yelling for water to quench the 'fire,' Alison's husband hears the word 'water' only, mistakes it for the announcement that the deluge is coming, and cuts the rope of his boat in which he had been awaiting that moment to be prepared, but instead crashes to the floor and gets badly hurt, making himself an utter fool about whom everyone laughs sarcastically: "The folk gan laughen at his fantasye. / Into the roof they kiken and they cape / And turned all his harm unto a jape" (3840–42). As if this were not enough, the audience of the story-telling by the Canterbury pilgrims also break out in laughter: "Whan folk had laughen at this

Middle High German *mære*, see Klaus Grubmüller, "Wer lacht im Märe – und wozu?" *Lachgemeinschaften*, 111–24.

¹⁶⁹ However, there is some indication of her own laughter, or rather a giggle: "'Tehee,' quod she and clapte the wyndow to" (3740).

¹⁷⁰ Kathleen A. Bishop, "Queer Punishments: Tragic and Comic Sodomy in the Death of Edward II and in Chaucer's *Miller's Tale*," *The Canterbury Tales Revisited-21st Century Interpretations*, ed. eadem and David Matthews (Newcastle-upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2008), 16–24.

nyce cas / Of Absolon and hende Nicholas, / Diverse folk diversly they seyde, / But for the moore part they lough and pleyde" ("The Reeve's Prologue," 3885–88). Finally, considering the entire set up and the condition for their laughter, we as the modern audience are also invited, as voyeurs, to laugh as well, which can also be inferred from the medieval audience. In other words, Chaucer builds intricate chains of communication via laughter from the intradiegetic to the extradiegetic level, transforming his text into an amazingly transparent interplay of actions, sentiments, and reactions in which everyone finds him/herself mirrored, whether as a person laughing about that scene or, indirectly, as the next butt of the joke, to stay in the image.

Telling good stories creates happiness and harmony even among the narrative audience, as the Cook's reaction to the Reeve's tale indicates: "For ioie him thoughte he clawed him on the bak. / 'Ha, ha,' quod he, 'for Cristes passioun, / This miller hadde a sharpe conclusioun / Upon his argument of herberage!" ("The Cook's Prologue," 4326–29). Laughter can also hurt and stab another person, as the exchange between the Host and the Cook indicates, whereas the former ridicules the latter for his evil practices in his profession, but immediately seeks cover behind the defense in which he said everything in jest ("... 'But yet I pray thee be nat wroth for game; / A man may seye ful sooth in game and pley'," 4354–55). The Cook, however, not short of wit, simply replays him with a satirical tale concerning a "hostileer" (4360), whereupon he breaks out in laughter: "And therewithal he lough and made cheere, / And seyde his tale, as ye shul after heere" (4363–64).

Then again, we hear from the Wife of Bath that her last husband used to read in his book filled with accounts about evil women and about the dangers of marriage. This was originally expounded by "Valerie and Theofraste," that is, in the tract of Walter Map (ca. 1140–ca. 1208), directed against marriage (*Epistola Valerii ad Rufinum*), and in Theophrastus's *Liber Aureolus Theophrast de Nuptiis*, which has survived only in Jerome's *Against Jovinian*.¹⁷¹ Chuckling away about the nasty attacks, this husband arouses his wife's serious anger: "At which book he lough alwey ful faste" ("The Wife of Bath's Prologue," 672). She reminds her audience that if any woman had written anything similar, she would have poured her hatred and contempt over men with the same full force: "They wolde han writen of men moore wikkednesse / Than al the mark of Adam may redresse / The children of Mercurie and Venus" (695–97). Nevertheless, it behooves us to return and to remember that the Wife of Bath's husband laughs about these nasty comments, obviously both in full agreement and determined by misogyny, just as

¹⁷¹ For the relevant collection of these types of texts, see *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended: An Anthology of Medieval Texts*, ed. Alcuin Blamires with Karen Pratt and C. W. Marx (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).

would be the case today with men telling dirty jokes about women. His laughter, then, reveals a rather ambivalent attitude, partly determined by his agreement with the hostile statements about the other sex, partly influenced by his fear of his own wife since he finds himself in the very situation these ancient authors are warning their audience about. Since he cannot easily find a way out of this dialectical condition, he laughs, both in agreement and in self-abjection, if we can really identify this laughter in this manner, considering the brevity of the text. We know for sure, however, that his laughter irritates her to no end, which ultimately leads to a serious fight between them from which she rises triumphantly, beating him into obedience.

As much as he tries to make fun of women at large, the Friar laughs about the Wife of Bath after she has completed her introductory remarks, ridiculing her for her presumed incompetence in coming to the point of telling her story, constantly deviating from the main target because of her reflections upon her own life: "The Frere lough whan he hadde heard all this. / 'Now Dame,' quod he, 'so have I joye or blis, / This is a long preamble of a tale!'" (829–31). Significantly, however, he laughs out of contempt because of her poor narrative skills, and also because he finds women contemptible altogether (which might not be so surprising considering his status as a clerk). His reaction, however, both his laughter and his sneering, provoke the other members of the company to intervene, which thus intensifies the complex interplay of the group of pilgrims and story tellers.

Taking all the evidence together, as Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* clearly demonstrate, people, as social, political beings, tend to break out into laughter particularly when they find themselves in a group setting where different people interact and provoke irritation, and frustration, but then also mockery and ridicule. Laughter in this Middle English text carries a plethora of meanings and functions on numerous functional levels, as Chaucer signals in ever changing approaches, having his protagonists laugh as much about each other or about statements spoken by someone or written down in a book as about a situation or an embarrassment. Each time the audience is invited to join, and yet also to distance itself, and we also perceive most clearly how much laughter carries an infinitude of meaning and intentions, challenging traditional power structures and hierarchies, expressing consent, disapproval, scorn, contempt, hatred, frustration, embarrassment, and the like.¹⁷²

¹⁷² Harry Levin, *Veins of Humor*. Harvard English Studies, 3 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972); Frances McNeely Leonard, *Laughter in the Courts of Love: Comedy in Allegory, from Chaucer to Spenser* (Norman, OK: Pilgrim Books, 1981); Barry Sanders, *Sudden Glory: Laughter as Subversive History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995); Andrew James Johnston, "The Exegetics of Laughter: Religious Parody in Chaucer's Miller's Tale," *A History of English Laughter: Laughter from Beowulf to Beckett and Beyond*, ed. Manfred Pfister. Internationale Forschungen zur Allgemeinen und Vergleichenden Literaturwissenschaft, 2002 (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2002),

Significantly, by the late Middle Ages, and particularly since the second half of the fourteenth century, laughter seems to have gained an increasingly stronger foothold in all artistic and literary manifestations, since Chaucer's examples are not the only ones at all. The highly unique, yet also typical peasant satire by the Constance notary public Heinrich Wittenwiler, *Der Ring* (ca. 1400), offers extraordinarily good examples of the wide range of topics, images, ideas, or concepts people deemed funny or worthy of being satirized. Stephanie Hagen discovers, for instance, multiple examples of the comic focused on figures, situations, and language, but she goes one step further and associates these considerably more intensive expressions of laughter with social-economic conflicts between the guilds and the patriciate class.

For her, Wittenwiler has his audience/reading public laugh about the peasants because they represent the riotous members of the guilds who tried to usurp the administrative and financial power within the city.¹⁷³

We might not have available a broad definition of humor or laughter that would embrace all those examples discussed above and those that the contributors to this volume will examine. Only a very intensive interdisciplinary approach involving psychologists and linguists, for instance, seems to promise a solution in the future.¹⁷⁴ Of course, the literary evidence normally provides many opportunities to probe the issue intensively and from a set of most complex perspectives. But art history, perhaps even music history, not to speak of historical documents (chronicles perhaps), might add their weight to the topic of our book. Let us try to work with some visual material, at least, and question to what extent medieval and early-modern artists were interested in depicting happy, if not laughing, individuals. There would be no need to refer to the plethora of images portraying the five wise and five foolish virgins, often seen carved in stone and depicted on stained glass windows at famous buildings in France, such as the Amiens Cathedral, the Cathédrale Saint-Étienne d'Auxerre, in Bourges, at Notre-Dame of Laon, Notre Dame de Paris, Notre-Dame de Reims, in Sens and at Notre-Dame de Strasbourg, in Germany, such as in Freiburg, Lübeck and at the Erfurt Cathedral,

17–33; Timothy D. Arner, "No Joke: Transcendent Laughter in the Teseida and the Miller's Tale," *Studies in Philology* 102.2 (2005): 143–58.

¹⁷³ Stephanie Hagen, *Heinrich Wittenwilers 'Ring' – ein ästhetisches Vexierbild: Studien zur Struktur des Komischen. Literatur – Imagination – Realität. Anglistische, germanistische, romanistische Studien*, 45 (Trier: WVT Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2008), 118–22. For her, Wittenwiler's *Ring* offers extraordinary examples of burlesque comic (123–28).

¹⁷⁴ Dieter Hörhammer, "Humor," 84. He criticizes, above all, those methods that are predicated on a diffuse terminology in order to absolutize their own concept of humor without a concrete basis in a solid philological analysis. Hörhammer challenges especially the study by Franck Evrard, *L'Humour*. Collection Contours Littéraires (Paris: Hachette Livre, 1996), and indirectly also André Breton's *Anthologie de l'humour noir* (Paris: Edition du Sagittaire, 1940).

and the Cathedral of Magdeburg, and in Switzerland, such as at the cathedrals of Basel and Bern.¹⁷⁵ Then we could investigate the wide range of marginal drawings and miniatures in late-medieval books of hours or related genres.

One most dramatic example of a truly smiling person can be found among the group of donor sculptures in the western choir of the Naumburg cathedral, in the vicinity of Halle/Saale, today in the state of Sachsen-Anhalt, Germany. The early-Romanesque cathedral was first built between 1028 and 1050. Later the cathedral was rebuilt in the Gothic style, sometime before 1215; and the western choir (or chancel) around 1250. This choir with its gargoyles, the founder figures, the rood screen, and perhaps even the architectural frame were created by the so-called Naumburger master and his workshop. These twelve donor figures prove to be most exceptional because they were lay aristocrats, whereas we normally find sculptures of saints, apostles, and martyrs. They are identified, which is highly unusual for the Middle Ages, by name, and they impress us through their realistic appearance: Gerburg, Konrad, Hermann and his wife Reglindis (a Polish princess), Dietmar, Syzzo, Wilhelm, Thimo, Eckehard II and his wife Uta, Gepa or Berchta, otherwise known as Adelheid, and Dietrich. They belonged to the highest echelon of society and held the rank of margrave/margravine, count/countess.¹⁷⁶

Originally they had been buried in or around the church building, and Eckehard and Uta even within the choir; but when the new cathedral was erected, the graves were removed and replaced by these life-like tombstones. The sculptor could not create true portraits since these donors had all died a hundred or two hundred years before. Some of them form antithetical pairs, such as Eckehard and Hermann (for the men), or Reglindis and Uta (for the women), but otherwise they are mostly arranged as couples, with Herrmann and Reglindis in the center of the ensemble because they had been the last owners of the Naumburg castle. As far as we can tell, the artist had received his training in France and had created a number of significant sculptures in Amiens, Noyon, Metz, and Strasbourg. Since 1239 he had worked in Mainz, and he began with his sculptures in Naumburg around 1250, ending up in Meißen after 1260.¹⁷⁷

Uta, as seems typical of many Gothic sculptures, looks indeterminably into the distance with a very stern face, almost spiritualized. Reglindis, on the other hand,

¹⁷⁵ Max Hasse, *Die törichten und die klugen Jungfrauen*. Lübecker Museumshefte, 3 (Lübeck: Museen für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte der Hansestadt Lübeck, 1961).

¹⁷⁶ Wolfgang Ulrich, *Uta von Naumburg: eine deutsche Ikone*. Kleine kulturwissenschaftliche Bibliothek, 59 (Berlin: Wagenbach, 1998); Helga Scieurie and Friedrich Möbius, *Der Naumburger Westchor*. Werners Kunstgeschichte (Worms: Werners Verlagsgesellschaft, 1989).

¹⁷⁷ Beate Becker, Horst Büttner, et al., *Der Bezirk Halle*. 2nd ed. Georg Dehio, *Handbuch der deutschen Kunstdenkmäler* (1974; Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1978), 304–14; Ernst Schubert, with Bettina Georgi and Ernst Ullmann, "Naumburg," *The Dictionary of Art*, ed. Jane Turner. Vol. 22 (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1996), 691–93.

our major witness written into stone for laughter in the Middle Ages, heartily smiles, or might be about to laugh, displaying full cheeks and very cheerful eyes.¹⁷⁸ It would be difficult to identify any other major medieval sculpture determined by such a happy face as Reglindis's.¹⁷⁹ Of course, this does not mean that we would not be able to identify many further examples,¹⁸⁰ though Reglindis seems to be one of the most famous figures in medieval art history, perhaps only matched by the even better known masterpiece by Leonardo da Vinci, "Mona Lisa," or *La Gioconda* (1503–1505, perhaps slightly earlier).¹⁸¹ Any visitor of a Gothic cathedral or of a medieval castle, not to speak of the countless museums holding medieval and early-modern paintings and sculptures, can suddenly come across a laughing or smiling face. However, there has never been a systematic search, probably because 'laughter' seems to be an inappropriate, perhaps even unwelcome feature of premodern life according to modern readers or spectators. Moreover, laughter in the Middle Ages can represent so many different intentions or motifs which would considerably complicate our understanding of that world. Not surprisingly, often the blessed souls, martyrs, and saints appear as laughing, and there is even a heartily smiling Archangel Michael in the crypt of the Constance cathedral delivering the annunciation to the Virgin Mary. But then we also encounter laughing souls condemned to Hell, fools, and sinners, and then a whole gamut of ordinary people presented with smiling faces.

¹⁷⁸ See, for instance, Herbert Küas, *Die Naumburger Werkstatt*. Forschungen zur deutschen Kunstgeschichte, XXVI (Berlin: Deutscher Verein für Kunstwissenschaft, 1937); Walter Schlesinger, *Meissner Dom und Naumburger Westchor: Ihre Bildwerke in geschichtlicher Betrachtung* (Münster and Cologne: Böhlau, 1952); Ernst Schubert, *Der Westchor des Naumburger Doms: Ein Beitrag zur Datierung und zum Verständnis der Standbilder*, 2nd ed. (1964; Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1965); id. "Der Westchor des Naumburger Doms, der Chor der Klosterkirche in Schulpforta und der Meißner Domchor," *Dies diem docet: ausgewählte Aufsätze zur mittelalterlichen Kunst und Geschichte in Mitteldeutschland. Festgabe zum 75. Geburtstag von Ernst Schubert*, ed. Hans-Joachim Krause. Quellen und Forschungen zur Geschichte Sachsen-Anhalts, 3 (Cologne, Weimar, and Vienna: Böhlau, 2003), 228–47; Holger Kunde, "Der Westchor des Naumburger Doms und die Marienstiftskirche: Kritische Überlegungen zur Forschung," *Religiöse Bewegungen im Mittelalter: Festschrift für Matthias Werner zum 65. Geburtstag* (Cologne: 2007), 213–38 tries to develop a different explanation, which does not concern us here; Gerhard Straehle, "Der Naumburger Meister in der deutschen Kunstgeschichte: Einhundert Jahre deutsche Kunstgeschichtsschreibung 1886–989" (Ph.D. Diss. Munich 2008), now also in print (Heidelberg: Universitäts-Bibliothek, 2008: <http://achriv.ub.un-heidelberg.de/artdok/volltexte/2009/747> (last accessed on Jan. 30, 2010).

¹⁷⁹ For an image, see: <http://de.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Datei:Reglindis.JPG&filetimestamp=20080916205842> last accessed on Jan. 30, 2010).

¹⁸⁰ *Risus mediaevalis: Laughter in Medieval Literature and Art*, ed. Herman Braet, Guido Latré, and Werner Verbeke. Mediaevalia Lovaniensia, 1.30 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2003).

¹⁸¹ http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/8/85/Mona_Lisa.jpeg (last accessed on Jan. 30, 2010).



Figure 1: Reglindis, sculpture in the Naumburg Cathedral, Germany (photo by Linsengericht, Wikipedia, public domain)

But with this portrait we have already entered the Renaissance and the early-modern world in which the evidence for laughter, humor, jest, or merriment grows exponentially. Before we proceed, let us, however, consider one more major Gothic sculpture with a noticeable smile on her face, the one of Queen Adelheid, consort of Emperor Otto I, the sculptures of both created around 1270, hence representing projections of idealized figures from the past, now serving as patron saints. Adelheid of Burgundy was born ca. 931 and died on December 16 or 17, 999 in Selz, Alsace. Both she and her husband are portrayed in remarkable sculptures in the Cathedral of Meissen near Halle, Germany. But whereas Otto looks rather stern, holding the imperial insignia in both of his hands (lance and imperial orb, or globus cruciger¹⁸²), the sculptor took the liberty to create a truly smiling face for Adelheid.¹⁸³

Although she does not look into her husband's face, and even bends her head slightly down, there is no shyness or embarrassment to be observed. Instead, Adelheid smilingly beams into the world, humbly, for sure, but certainly unhesitatingly, self-assured and happy, whereas her husband seems distraught, weighed down, perhaps, by his office as emperor or meditating on the meaning of the afterlife. Significantly, while Otto stares somehow into the distance, though his body is turning a little to his wife, altogether maybe questioning himself as a lay person and his powerful rank as emperor, Adelheid looks at him from the side, with her head slightly bent, her whole body turned somewhat toward him.¹⁸⁴

But both had served as founders of the cathedral, and scholars have suggested that the imperial couple is depicted in the idealized image of loyal Christians who are already anticipating the glory of God, Otto voicing spiritual words, Adelheid happily listening to them.¹⁸⁵ At any rate, the artist delighted in having the Empress

¹⁸² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Globus_cruciger (last accessed on Jan. 30, 2010).

¹⁸³ http://www.wga.hu/art/zgothic/gothic/3/12g_1300.jpg (last accessed on Jan. 30, 2010).

¹⁸⁴ For an extensive biography, see Eduard Hlawitschka, "Kaiserin Adelheid," *Frauen des Mittelalters in Lebensbildern*, ed. Karl Rudolf Schnith (Graz, Vienna, and Cologne: Verlag Styria, 1997), 27–48.

For another good image, see:

http://images.google.com/imgres?imgurl=http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/0/03/Meissner-dom-stifter.jpg&imgrefurl=http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Meissner-dom-stifter.jpg&usq=__24-hYZGiu-jLcNeB2gIhU9jo960=&h=856&w=1340&sz=247&hl=en&start=2&tbnid=yMsu5MLuo0eHRM:&tbnh=96&tbnw=150&prev=/images%3Fq%3Dmeissener%2Bdom%26gbv%3D1%26hl%3Den (last accessed on Jan. 30, 2010).

¹⁸⁵ Ernst Schubert, *Stätten sächsischer Kaiser*. Photos by Klaus G. Beyer (Leipzig, Jena, and Berlin: Urania-Verlag, 1990), 257–60; see also the contributions to *Architektur und Skulptur des Meissner Domes im 13. und 14. Jahrhundert*, ed. Heinrich Magirius. *Forschungen zur Bau- und Kunstgeschichte des Meissner Domes*, 2 (Weimar: Verlag Hermann Böhlaus Nachfolger, 2001); see also Helga Wäß, *Form und Wahrnehmung mitteldeutscher Gedächtnisskulptur im 14. Jahrhundert*. Vol. 1: *Ein Beitrag zu mittelalterlichen Grabmonumenten, Epitaphen und Kuriosa: Ein Beitrag zu mittelalterlichen Grabmonumenten, Epitaphen und Kuriosa in Sachsen, Sachsen-Anhalt, Thüringen, Nord-Hessen, Ost-Westfalen und Südniedersachsen*. Vol. 2: *Katalog ausgewählter Objekte vom Hohen Mittelalter bis zum*

expressing her deep joy; here certainly determined by her Christian devotion. Altogether, both Reglindis and Adelheid thus serve as outstanding examples of laughter, or rather strong happiness and merriment, written into Gothic sculptures. Their laughter is not that of foolishness or sarcasm; instead they are presented as happy, delightful, and simply cheerful women, very much in contrast to the other male figures.

Anfang des 15. Jahrhunderts (Bristol and Berlin: TENE, 2006): "Meißen - Die Grabmomumente des Mittelalters," catalogue nos. 568–637; here 403–42. See also the certainly excellent article, with great colored photographs and a solid and up-to-date bibliography, in *Wikipedia* at: http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mei%C3%9Fner_Dom (last accessed on Jan. 30, 2010).



Figure 2: Adelheid of Burgundy, Cathedral of Meissen, Germany (photo by Kolossos, Wikipedia, public domain)

For examples of laughing, giggling, chuckling, or mocking individuals in the early modern period, we only have to think of several major texts, such as the anonymous collection of tales about and with the famous protagonist Till Eulenspiegel (perhaps by Herman Bote in Brunswick, Germany, first printed in 1510), François Rabelais's *Les Horribles et épouvantables faits et prouesses du très renommé Pantagruel, Roi des Dipsodes, fils du grand gént Gargantua* (1532), and his *La Vie très horrifique du grand Gargantua, père de Pantagruel* (1534).¹⁸⁶ Rabelais drew, of course, from many older sources, and curiously especially from late-medieval sermons.

Erich Auerbach, in his famous monograph *Mimesis*, comments on the rich interweaving of many different styles: "sie [the style] gestattete ihm das den reaktionären Gewalten der Zeit Anstöße in einem Zwielficht zwischen Spaß und Ernst vorzubringen, was ihm im Notfall erleichterte, sich der vollen Verantwortung zu entziehen" (268; it permitted him to present those aspects that were regarded as inappropriate by the reactionary forces of the time in a twilight between facetious and earnest, which facilitated him, in an emergency to withdraw from the full responsibility).¹⁸⁷ Auerbach recognized further the specific intention pursued by Rabelais: "eine[] produktive [] Ironie, die die gewohnten Aspekte und Proportionen verwirrt, die das Wirkliche im Überwirklichen, das Weise im Nürrischen, die Empörung in der behaglich-würzigen Lebensfreude erscheinen und im Spiel der Möglichkeiten die Möglichkeit der Freiheit aufleuchten läßt" (268; a productive irony which confuses the customary aspects and proportions, and which makes the real appear in the light of the unreal, the wise in the foolish, the protest in the self-content pleasant reality of life, and in the range of possibilities the possibility of freedom). Although, if we continue this stream of thought, Rabelais did not operate with explicit or drastic laughter, the entire work proves to be predicated on it, which also exposes the actual performance of laughter by the reading audience.

But there were also severe critics of laughter, such as Erasmus of Rotterdam, who warned his audience, primarily young boys whom he wanted to educate and help to grow into courtly society with the proper behavioral norms, using the following words:

To laugh at every word or deed is the sign of a fool; to laugh at none the sign of a blockhead. It is quite wrong to laugh at improper words or actions. Loud laughter and the immoderate mirth that shakes the whole body and is for that reason called . . .

¹⁸⁶ Bernd Renner, *Difficile est saturam non scribere: L'Herméneutique de la satire rabelaisienne. Études rabelaisiennes*, 45 (Geneva: Droz, 2007).

¹⁸⁷ Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: Dargestellte Wirklichkeit in der abendländischen Literatur*. 10th ed. (1946; Tübingen and Basel: A. Francke Verlag, 2001), 268. See also the English translation by Willard R. Trask: *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953).

'discord' by the Greeks, are unbecoming to any age but much more so to youth. The neighing sound that some people make when they laugh is also unseemly. And the person who opens his mouth wide in a rictus, with wrinkled cheeks and exposed teeth, is also impolite. This is a canine habit and is called a sardonic smile. The face should express mirth in such a way that it neither distorts the appearance of the mouth nor evinces a dissolute mind.¹⁸⁸

Contemporaneously, more and more other authors and artists delved into the world of laughter and humor, adding tremendously to the global discourse on the transgressive and absurd.¹⁸⁹ Satirical art works and literature have gained increasingly in public appeal, whether they combined didacticism or theological messages with the facetious and entertaining.¹⁹⁰ As Christa Grössinger emphasizes, the interest is increasingly focused, and this also in visual documents, on humor and folly.¹⁹¹ One of the oddest, yet also highly illuminating objects reflecting the new sense of satire, sarcasm, and wit was the chastity belt, which, allegedly an invention of the Middle Ages, which did not really emerge as a topic and motif both in literature and the arts until the early fifteenth century (Conrad Kyeser, 1410) and then, because of its mythical character, quickly gained a strong foothold in Italian and German satirical prose narratives, and then in woodcuts, broadsheets, and even on scabbards and coats of arms.¹⁹² These references allow us to grasp how much the broad field of laughter and the comic—one elucidating the other—sheds light on fundamental aspects of cultural history. Consequently we should also include comparable expressions of the bizarre and grotesque, the silly and the foolish, all serving to create laughter, a timeless approach to communication and interaction within the human community.¹⁹³

¹⁸⁸ Here quoted from Sebastian Coxon, "Laughter and the Process of Civilization," 17; see also Erasmus of Rotterdam, *On Good Manners for Boys: 'De civilitate morum puerilium'*, trans. and annotated by Brian McGregor. *Collected Works of Erasmus: Literary and Educational Writings*, 3 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), 269–89; here 275.

¹⁸⁹ Ryan D. Giles, *The Laughter of the Saints: Parodies of Holiness in Late Medieval and Renaissance Spain* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009).

¹⁹⁰ Barbara Könniker, *Satire im 16. Jahrhundert: Epoche – Werk – Wirkung*. *Arbeitsbücher zur Literaturgeschichte* (Munich: Beck, 1991); Paul Aron, *Histoire du pastiche: le Pastiche littéraire français, de la Renaissance à nos jours* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2008); Albrecht Classen, *Deutsche Schwankliteratur des 16. Jahrhunderts*.

¹⁹¹ Christa Grössinger, *Humor and Folly in Secular and Profane Prints of Northern Europe, 1430–1540* (London and Turnhout: Harvey Miller, 2002). See also the contribution to the present volume by Martha Moffitt Peacock.

¹⁹² Albrecht Classen, *The Medieval Chastity Belt: A Myth-Making Process*. *The New Middle Ages* (New York and Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

¹⁹³ *Semiotik, Rhetorik und Soziologie des Lachens: vergleichende Studien zum Funktionswandel des Lachens vom Mittelalter zur Gegenwart. Die Ergebnisse des Dreizehnten Blaubeurer Symposions . . . , das vom 23. bis 26. Februar 1995 im Heinrich-Fabri-Institut der Universität Tübingen . . . stattfand*, ed. Lothar Fietz, Joerg O. Fichte, and Hans-Werner Ludwig (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1996); Friedemann Richert with Günter Vogel, *Kleine Geistesgeschichte des Lachens* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft,

Many important examples for this kind of laughter, aiming at ridiculing the foolish ignoramuses in this world, can be found in sixteenth-century jest narratives (Schwänke), some of which I have referred to above already (see also Sebastian Brant's famous *Ship of Fools*, 1494). To illustrate the specific conditions, however, let us take a closer look at one of them composed by the Hessian writer Hans-Wilhelm Kirchhof in his *Wendunmuth* (first edition in 1563, reprinted until 1603).¹⁹⁴ A boorish and stupid farmer one day arrives at a physician's office with his wife's urine. She suffers from some mysterious sickness, as he believes, and he would like to help her regain her health, not realizing that she is nothing but obese and overly lazy, the one aspect conditioning the other. The farmer regards the medical doctor with great respect and believes that he would know everything there is to know here in this world. But when he realizes that the doctor does not even know his name, he voices great astonishment: "ich meinet ir wüßt alle ding und wisset solchs nicht im harm zuo ersehen?"¹⁹⁵ (I thought you knew everything, but now you cannot figure it out [the farmer's name] by looking at the urine?). The doctor only responds with laughter, quickly realizing what kind of ignoramus he is facing.

Nevertheless, it gets worse, or rather better. Upon the doctor's inquiry regarding his wife's stool (here in the meaning of her excrement), the farmer mistakes it as a question concerning a piece of furniture, a three-legged stool. Finally, having learned what the doctor really means, the farmer comments that she had not had a big stool the other day, indicating with his hands that it must have actually weighed more than four and a half pounds (139). For the physician this exchange proves to be too much, and he can no longer hold on and bursts out in loud laughter: "Auß diser erzelung deß villani ward er heftiger zuo lachen getrieben, sprach derhalben zuo im . . ." (139; The peasant's account made him laugh out loud, and therefore he said to him . . .).

Finally, taking pity on the lad's sad situation with the lazy wife, he does not even take a payment for his medical advice; instead he gives the fool a coin and sends him home with a not too subtle message that his wife would really need a good beating to get out of her laziness, which then would reconstitute her health. Although then no further laughter can be heard, the subsequent events are

2009); for the role of laughter in later periods, see Eckart Schörle, *Die Verhöflichung des Lachens: Lachgeschichte im 18. Jahrhundert*. Kulturen des Komischen, 4 (Bielefeld: Aisthesis-Verlag, 2007).

¹⁹⁴ Bodo Gotzkowsky, "Volksbücher": Prosaromane, Renaissancenovellen, Versdichtungen und Schwankbücher. *Bibliographie der deutschen Drucke*. Part I: *Drucke des 15. und 16. Jahrhunderts*. Bibliotheca Bibliographica Aureliana, CXXV (Baden-Baden: Valentin Koerner, 1991), 513–16. See also the VD 17 online at:

<http://gso.gbv.de/xslt/DB=1.28/SET=1/TTL=1/SHW?FRST=2> (last accessed on Jan. 30, 2010).

¹⁹⁵ Hans Wilhelm Kirchhof, *Wendunmuth*, ed. Hermann Oesterley. Bibliothek des Litterarischen Vereins in Stuttgart, XCV (1869; Hildesheim and New York: Georg Olms, 1980), 138.

supposed to trigger such laughter among the audience because at one point the married couple enters a fight, and when he has won the first round chasing her out of the house, he suddenly realizes that some of the ingredients of the doctor's recipe really meant this kind of physical violence to set his wife straight again.

As Kirchhof emphasizes in his own prologue, these jest narratives serve, above all, as literary entertainment and are supposed to evoke laughter about ignorant, foolish people, their sayings and actions. But he also pursued didactic goals,

sondern seyn auch nutz und nottwendig einem der mit vielen geschefften, schweren, ja auch bisweilen unnützen gedanken, zorn und trauwrigkeit, beladen, gleich wie seinem unwillenden magen ein guote und seltzame speiß, also sein gemüt (göttlichen trost unauffgegeben, vilmehr zuo vorderst genennet) erquicken und zuorecht bringen (vol. I, 5)

[they are also of good use and necessary for those who are burdened with much business, with heavy, at times even unnecessary thoughts, wrath, and sadness and can provide new enjoyment and health again to a heavy mind (not to forget divine consolation, which should be mentioned first—just like a good and extraordinary meal can give his distressed stomach relief and heal it).]

The range of possible motifs with features related to laughing grows exponentially in the early-modern world, especially if we think of such great artists as Hieronymus Bosch and Pieter Brueghel, not to mention the vast corpus of relevant texts.¹⁹⁶ We might also have to consider the important role attributed to laughter as a form of medicine against the grave danger of melancholy, though this would lead me too far afield here.¹⁹⁷ Opening this intriguing can of worms, if not the Pandora's Box, we can understand why only truly interdisciplinary approaches will allow us to reach a broader platform by way of individual scholars focusing on specific aspects or works, which the contributions to our volume will pursue in detail.

A careful investigation of this phenomenon drawing on other, early-modern, material can yield numerous examples of scenes, images, and motifs in the history of Western art where individuals are shown laughing.¹⁹⁸ Simon Vouet (1590–1649),

¹⁹⁶ Walter S. Gibson, *The Art of Laughter in the Age of Bosch and Bruegel* (Groningen: The Gerson Lectures Foundation, 2003); for a thorough and critical review, see Christian Vöhringer, in www.sehepunkte.de/2008/01/12918.html (last accessed on Jan. 30, 2010). Gibson examines especially the aspects of laughter as a commodity, and Brueghel's art of laughter, then also rustic reveling and making good cheer in the context of eating and drinking.

¹⁹⁷ This aspect continues to intrigue modern medical scholars; see Elizabeth R. Adams, "Is Laughter the Best Medicine?: A Study of the Effects of Humor on Perceived Pain and Affect," *Activities, Adaptation & Aging* 8.3/4 (1986): 157–75.

¹⁹⁸ Heike Ostarhild, *Wenn Meisterwerke Zähne zeigen: Über das Lachen in der Kunst* (Tübingen: Legat-Verlag, 2002).

when he created one of the first Baroque paintings with his "Father Time Overcome by Love, Hope, and Beauty," 1627, depicted the allegorical figures Love and Beauty joyfully fighting against the old man, Time, already defeated by his opponents who laugh about his idle attempts to resist them.¹⁹⁹ But François Clouet (ca. 1510–1572) had already developed the motif of laughter much more intricately in his "Diane de Poitiers" (1571) where we see, behind the softly smiling lady sitting in a bathtub, her body naked, the wet-nurse who is suckling a baby, and behind her, in the background, a maid holding a large vessel. Each of them seems to smile, but only the wet-nurse has her lips opened, indicating her unabashed enjoyment of having the baby at her exposed breast.²⁰⁰

Dealing with a very different category of laughter, that of a rather foolish young man, Annibale Caracci (1560–1609) portrayed a laughing figure upon whose shoulder sits a monkey, obviously pulling his hair, to which the man responds with a giggle.²⁰¹ Laughter as a result of drunkenness appears in the painting by Frans Hals (ca. 1581/1585–1666), "Malle Babbe," where the monkey is replaced by an owl, a symbolic bird signaling the old woman's gullibility and perhaps sinfulness.²⁰² True joy, by contrast, is expressed by a small boy sculpted by Desiderio da Settignano (1428/1431–1464) in marble, ca. 1464, whose open mouth and happy face altogether convey a most delightful impression of an innocent child that laughs without any concerns.²⁰³ For a happily smiling boy of an older age, see Giovanni Francesco Caroto (ca. 1480–1546), whose red-headed boy directly looks at the viewer, holding a simple drawing of a human figure, obviously done by a small child, in his right hand.²⁰⁴

But laughter can also reflect hatred, anger, envy, jealousy, and many other vices, as we can see on the faces of mocking men surrounding Jesus taking the cross in Hieronymus Bosch's "Ecce Homo" from ca. 1515 and 1516.²⁰⁵ Their mean spirit is clearly indicated by their ugly faces, as they all laugh together in a gruesome, brutal manner. Then there are numerous paintings showing laughing people who have drunk alcohol, or who dance and play music, which creates joy on their faces. Most intriguing seems to be the motif of laughter associated with love, such as

¹⁹⁹ <http://www.wga.hu/frames-e.html?/html/v/vouet/index.html> (last accessed on Jan. 30, 2010).

²⁰⁰ <http://www.wga.hu/frames-e.html?/html/c/clouet/francois/index.html> (last accessed on Jan. 30, 2010).

²⁰¹ http://www.yourwaytoflorence.com/uffizi1/Uffizi_Pictures.asp?Contatore=455 (last accessed on Jan. 30, 2010).

²⁰² <http://www.wga.hu/frames-e.html?/html/h/hals/frans/04-1633/37malle.html> (last accessed on Jan. 30, 2010).

²⁰³ http://dcist.com/2007/08/14/desiderio_da_se.php (last accessed on Jan. 30, 2010).

²⁰⁴ <http://www.bigpainters.com/displayimage.php?album=215&pos=2> (last accessed on Jan. 30, 2010).

²⁰⁵ http://thypott-art.com/painting/Bosch/jesus_taking_the_cross (last accessed on Jan. 30, 2010).

Hans von Aachen's (1552–1615) "Joking Couple" where the happy smiles on all faces strongly underscore the bliss of the emotional relationship.²⁰⁶

The greatest surprise regarding the history of laughter might well be that throughout the entire Middle Ages writers, poets, and artists (perhaps even composers) focused much on the possibilities ensuing from comical situations, comical figures, and comical speech acts, whether within the confines of the Church—see, for instance, the "Feast of the Fools," or multiple examples in the miracle accounts by Caesarius of Heisterbach (ca. 1180–1240)²⁰⁷—at the secular courts, or in the countryside, not to mention the urban space that had been growing quite rapidly since the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The global interest in the fool, in masquerading, in the topos of the topsy-turvy world, and the delight in mass parodies easily confirms this observation.²⁰⁸

We can easily confirm that in the late Middle Ages and the early modern age we hear many more times of hilarious situations and funny exchanges, but this does not mean that the culture in the early Middle Ages was entirely devoid of it, as some scholars have suggested.²⁰⁹ *Mutatis mutandis*, the same applies to the culture and history after the Middle Ages, whether we think of the Renaissance, the Protestant Reformation and Catholic Counter-Reformation, or the Baroque.²¹⁰ As Daniel Ménager notes with regard to Ronsard and his contemporaries, "Il est bien question de la puissance vitale et de la manière dont elle peut s'épuiser dans la joie ou le rire. Envisagé de cette façon, celui-ci change d'aspect. Il ne symbolise plus la vocation de l'homme au plaisir. Il illustre sa fragilité"²¹¹ (It is certainly a question regarding the vital power and the manner through which it can be exhausted in joy or in laughter. Seen from this angle, the [key] aspect [of laughter] changes. It does no longer symbolize man's preference for pleasure. It illustrates his fragility).

²⁰⁶ http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Image:Aachen_Joking_couple.jpg (last accessed on Jan. 30, 2010).

²⁰⁷ *Le Jongleur de Notre Dame*, trans. Paul Bretel. Traductions des classiques français du Moyen Âge, 64 (Paris: Champion, 2003); Jacques E. Merceron, "The Sacred and the Laughing Body in French Hagiographic and Didactic Literature of the Middle Ages," *"risus sacer – sacrum risibile,"* 2009, 101–16.

²⁰⁸ Michael Stegemann, "'Verkehrte Welt': Mess-Parodien des Mittelalters," *Mittelalter und Industrialisierung: St. Urbanus in Huckarde*, ed. Thomas Schilp and Barbara Welzel. Schriften der Conrad-von-Soest-Gesellschaft, 12 (Bielefeld: Verlag für Regionalgeschichte, 2009), 211–16; Birgit Franke and Barbara Welzel, "Die 'Verkehrte Welt' und ihre Regeln – Die Kanzel in Huckarde," *ibid.*, 217–39.

²⁰⁹ Sebastian Coxon, *Laughter and Narrative*, 182–83, leans toward that interpretation, although he is also aware of earlier examples of laughter.

²¹⁰ Heinz-Günter Schmitz, *Physiologie des Scherzes: Bedeutung und Rechtfertigung der Ars iocandi im 16. Jahrhundert*. Deutsche Volksbücher in Faksimiledrucken. Reihe B: Untersuchungen zu den deutschen Volksbüchern, Bd. 2 (Hildesheim and New York: G. Olms, 1972).

²¹¹ Daniel Ménager, *Le Renaissance et le rire*, 28.

Such perspectives can also be pursued with regard to Renaissance visual art and theater, where humor, wit, and explicit laughter gain much strength.²¹²

Beginning in the eighteenth century, philosophers, writers, artists, and other intellectuals embarked on an intensive debate on the true meaning of the comic, hence also about laughter itself, and offered many different theories, whether we think of Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679), Francis Hutcheson (1694–1746), Alexander Gerard (1728–1795), Lord Shaftesbury (1671–1713), and Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729–1781). That debate, interestingly, has continued ever since, which might allow us to conclude that the investigation of laughter indeed carries profound significance, and is, so to speak, not a laughable matter.²¹³

Considering the wealth of perspectives offered by the contributors to this volume, we can safely claim that laughter represents a major criterion on which to judge and evaluate the cultural-historical determinants of a society. We can even go one step further and argue that laughter rings throughout the centuries, which justifies extending the scope of our investigations even up to the long eighteenth century.²¹⁴ Of course, this does not imply at all that thereafter laughter disappeared—quite the contrary—but this cannot be the topic of the present book.

But even only a superficial glance at the broad range of philosophical discourse in Western civilization would quickly reveal the extent to which laughter has occupied some of the greatest minds who have developed a wide range of theories to explain the phenomenon of laughter itself, whether we think of Hobbes's "Superiority Theory," the generally formulated "Relief from Restraint Theory," or the "Incongruity Theory."

Whether we could, in good conscience, favor any of these three, or many others that also exist, seems rather doubtful.²¹⁵ It seems more important and pragmatic to approach our topic from a cultural-historical and mental-historical perspective, especially in light of the transgressive character of laughter against all authorities, especially against the Church. From early on the Shrovetide season, which gave

²¹² Paul Barolsky, *Infinite Jest: Wit and Humor in Italian Renaissance Art* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1978); see also Florence M. Weinberg, *Rabelais et les leçons du rire paraboles évangéliques et néoplatoniciennes*. L'Atelier de la Renaissance, 8 (Orléans: Paradigme, 2000); Sara Beam, *Laughing Matters: Farce and the Making of Absolutism in France* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007). See also the contribution by Martha Moffitt Peacock to the present volume, focusing on caricaturist art in the seventeenth-century Netherlands where the powerful wife begins to subjugate her husband who becomes the butt of public derision, a remarkable expression of a radical turn of the tables in the age-old gender conflict.

²¹³ Roger W. Müller Farguell, "Komik, das Komische: Aufklärung bis Ende 19. Jh.," *Historisches Wörterbuch der Rhetorik*, ed. Gert Ueding. Vol. 4 (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1998), 168–72.

²¹⁴ See the contribution to this volume by Allison P. Coudert.

²¹⁵ Michael Clark, "Humor and Incongruity," *The Philosophy of Laughter and Humor*, ed. John Morreall, 1987, 139–55; Mike W. Martin, "Humor and Aesthetic Enjoyment of Incongruities," *ibid.*, 172–86.

way to religious plays (comic drama such as *Le Jeu de la feuillée* from ca. 1275), the *sermon joyeux*, the *sotie*, the comic monologue (*fanfarol*), short acts by medical charlatans (*dits de l'herberie*), or the *fatrasie* (incoherent chatter), opened floodgates for public laughter and drastic humor, perhaps signaling that the authority of the medieval Church was rather limited at the beginning and thereafter often hardly anything other than a thin veneer, against which subsequently only the ideology of fear achieved the desired goal of radical subjugation.²¹⁶ Laughter rang throughout the Middle Ages and far beyond, and it continues to undermine power structures and hierarchies, which makes the investigation of this topic so topical and relevant even today.²¹⁷ Laughter also challenges traditions, norms, and standards, and surreptitiously questions assumptions, belief systems, ideologies, and values. Those who laugh often profile, if they do not try to hide their own insecurity and anxieties, presumption, arrogance, and pomp, revealing thereby, deliberately or not, the constructive character of human society determined by artificial power structures.

Following Bergson, Mary Douglas posits the following thesis: "It is funny when persons behave as if they were inanimate things. So a person caught in a repetitive routine, such as stammering or dancing after the music has stopped, is funny. Frozen posture, too rigid dignity, irrelevant mannerism, the noble pose interrupted by urgent physical needs, all are funny for the same reason. Humour chastises insincerity, pomposity, stupidity."²¹⁸ Moreover, she observes that "All jokes have this subversive effect on the dominant structure of ideas. Those which bring forward the physiological exigencies to which moral beings are subject, are using one universal, never-failing technique of subversion."²¹⁹ In other words, laughing unmaskes power structures and aims at their destruction: "The joke merely affords opportunity for realizing that an accepted pattern has no necessity. Its excitement lies in the suggestion that any particular ordering of experience may be arbitrary and subjective. It is frivolous in that it produces no real alternative, only an exhilarating sense of freedom from form in general."²²⁰

²¹⁶ Lloyd Bishop, *Comic Literature in France: From the Middle Ages to the Twentieth Century* (New Orleans: University Press of the South, 2004). He does not, however, enter into any theoretical discussions and mostly describes the literary genres in a factual manner. See also Jelle Koopmans, "Les Éléments farcesques dans la sottie française," *Farce and Farcical Elements*, ed. Wim Hüsken and Konrad Schoell. *Ludus*, 6 (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2002), 121–42. See also the contributions to the present volume by Connie Scarborough, Lia B. Ross, and Allison P. Coudert.

²¹⁷ Peter Dinzelsbacher, *Unglaube im "Zeitalter des Glaubens": Athismus und Skeptizismus im Mittelalter* (Badenweiler: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag, 2009); see also John H. Arnold, *Belief and Unbelief in Medieval Europe* (London: Hodder Arnold, 2005), 28.

²¹⁸ Mary Douglas, "Jokes," eadem, *Implicit Meanings: Essays in Anthropology* (London and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), 90–114; here 93.

²¹⁹ Douglas, "Jokes," 95.

²²⁰ Douglas, "Jokes," 96.

However, we can never contend ourselves with simplistic interpretations, since both foolish and blessed people are depicted in medieval tympana as laughing, such as those who are led into Hell, not understanding what is going on, and those who are privileged to enter Heaven. One such good example can be found at the Bamberg Cathedral (completed in 1111) with its Last Judgment scene above the door in the Prince's Portal (*Fürstenpforte*).²²¹ And we should also not forget the most remarkable form of laughter, softly expressed on the face of Empress Kunegunde (ca. 975/980–1033), wife of the German Emperor Henry II,²²² with the cheeks slightly pulled back, the lips almost imperceptibly opened, reflecting deep inner spirituality and joy, just like the famous Mona Lisa.²²³ I conclude here with an image of this remarkable Gothic sculpture, leaving everyone guessing what this female figure might be laughing, or smiling, about. Her happy face reveals deep inner joy, certainly spiritually motivated. Still, there is an unmistakable joy written into her features, perhaps characteristic of the idealized medieval queen.

²²¹ Though somewhat outdated, the photo illustrations in *Die Bildwerke des Bamberger Doms*. With accompanying comments by Karl Gröber (Leipzig: Insel, n.y [1938]), are of great value here. See also Tilman Breuer, *Der Dom zu Bamberg: Kunst und Geschichte*. Große Baudenkmäler, 223. 12th ed. (1980; Munich: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 1984); Andrea Hubel and Gabriele Schneidmüller, *Der Bamberger Dom*. 3rd. rev. ed. (2002; Petersberg: Imhof, 2009).

²²² Eduard Hlawitschka, "Kaiserin Kunigunde," *Frauen des Mittelalters in Lebensbildern*, ed. Karl Rudolf Schnith (Graz, Vienna, and Cologne: Verlag Syria, 1997), 72–89.

²²³ Unfortunately the sculpture is in very bad shape today, kept in the diocese museum of the cathedral of Bamberg, whereas the replica figure at the *Adampforte* does not do full justice to the original.



Figure 3: Empress Kunegunde, entrance to the cathedral of Bamberg, left side of Adam's Portal (*Adamsporte*) (public domain)

Following I will provide detailed summaries of each individual contribution, trying to expand on each by considering the wider context and some of the relevant research literature. Such summaries prove to be exceedingly important in that they allow me as editor to verify with the authors whether the main points of their papers are clearly spelled out and well documented. I exchanged each summary with the individual contributor repeatedly, resulting in an extensively reviewed and revised version reflecting our mutual agreements and understandings of the specific approach to laughter in each contribution.

When historiographers mention that their protagonists laughed, we need to pay close attention to such incidents because we might be able to identify powerful moments of transition or demonstration of power otherwise not clearly manifested. Whoever laughs out loud tends to indicate that s/he either holds a position of superiority, or tries to cover his/her lack thereof, if not insecurity or failure. Laughing in public can serve specific purposes, especially when a high-ranking person laughs in front of his or her people, explicitly demonstrating a specific power position. Moreover, the one who laughs easily proves to be self-assured enough to lead a group of people, to encourage them, or to inspire them. If a general or king laughs in public, he enjoins his people to join him in his derision of an opponent. To be sure, public laughing carries many meanings and deserves to be studied closely so as not to overlook or ignore political, social, ethical, or moral purposes implied thereby.

In her contribution to the present volume, Judith Hagen offers a close reading of such situations in the chronicle *Bella* by the late-antique Procopius (d. shortly after 560) dealing with Emperor Justinian's wars, led by the general Belisarius. Repeatedly the latter is portrayed as laughing about the futile attempts by his enemies, encouraging, thereby, all his soldiers to take courage and to be bold in their resolve and fight with all their might. The East-Roman, or Byzantine, soldier is presented on numerous occasions to take actions into his own hand, showing his men how superior they all really are, by deed and laughter, mocking the barbarian foes, whom he does not even deem worthy of his respect and his honorable treatment, deceiving them whenever possible, certainly predicated on a sense of arrogance.

Hagen also examines a variety of other situations where individual characters break out in laughter, expressing specific attitudes regarding their opponents, who could be either hostile leaders, or a whole population, such as the inhabitants of a city. The opposite, however, could occasionally also be the case, with the enemies taunting the Romans, laughing out loud, although then Procopius quickly indicates how little they really have good reason and soon enough experience their own downfall. In another situation, a defeated opponent is also reported as having laughed, the reason being, as Hagen underscores in her interpretation of the

chronicler's account, that he realized the tragic turn of his destiny from being aristocratic and free to being made a helpless prisoner, victim of cruel fate. Overall, Procopius utilized laughter as a means to illustrate traditional Roman virtues, which could, at some times, even be expressed by some of their enemies. In this sense, as Hagen emphasizes, the careful analysis of laughter allows us to grasp some of the basic values formulated by this late-antique chronicler. Significantly, this analysis also allows us to grasp fundamental phenomenon in power structures, whether in this chronicle or in ancient Greek texts, such as Homer's *Iliad* where Ulysses's killing of a common soldier, Thersites, triggers hearty laughter among his men who feel confirmed in their absolute belief in the authority of their leader and feel comforted, through the death of their miserable comrade, that the traditional balance of power has not been tipped in their own favor and that they, ironically, can continue in their fighting under Ulysses's command as before. As Douglas interprets this scene: "The men laugh to find themselves on the side of the leaders, in reverse of their behaviour a short time before."²²⁴

What role might laughter play in the world of religion apart from those elements that we have already observed above with regard to Hrotsvita of Gandersheim and other Christian writers, such as Jacobus de Voragine? If laughter can be identified as characteristic of human beings only, then there should be no reference to a laughing God. Nevertheless, there were certain tendencies in this regard within early-medieval Islam, despite the explicit statement in the *Qur'an* 42:11: "Nothing resembles Him. He is All-Hearing, All-Seeing."²²⁵ However, in the Hadith literature, the account of the Prophet Muhammed's life, which also includes many of his own comments and which is hence regarded as holy and complementary to the *Qur'an*, we encounter a startlingly anthropomorphized God. This means, as Livnat Holtzman points out in her contribution, the early Islamic tradition was familiar also with a God who not only has a physical body, but is also described at occasions as laughing, coming down to the level where ordinary people can even understand Him—a phenomenon that is familiar to the Western world through its countless hagiographical texts and religious narratives. Both here and in the Islamic religion, the theological viewpoint stressed that man was not supposed to create an image of Him. Nevertheless, in reality the laity could not help it and did it anyway, which proved to be an avenue for laughter to enter the discourse as well. Despite all oppositions by the rationalists and the traditionalists with rational tendencies, in the course of time both strands of approaches to God

²²⁴ Douglas, "Joke," 99. See also Stephen Halliwell, *Greek Laughter*.

²²⁵ *The Qur'an*, trans. with an Introduction by Tarif Khalidi. Penguin Classics. Deluxe Edition (New York: Penguin, 2008).

in Islam found a workable, though tenuous compromise predicated on accepting the anthropomorphized image, which yet required the abstinence of critical inquiry into the contradictory nature of this solution.

Holtzman begins with the analysis of the fourteenth-century *Hādī al-arwāḥ ilā bilād al-afrāḥ* (The Leader of the Souls to the Land of Joy) by the Damascene theologian Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyyah. Here the blessed are entitled to witness a laughing God who delights about their arrival in the promised land in the afterlife. The author drew in a very traditionalist manner from the Hadith literature, containing the Prophet Muhammed's teaching. Here we come across quite commonly meaningful but also cryptic scenes of the Prophet laughing, dating from the ninth through the fourteenth century. At the same time, God is shown to be laughing both at the believers and the disbelievers, which forces us to probe more deeply what the meaning of this actually very human behavior might signal and to grasp the correlation between the Prophet's and God's laughter, virtually an anathematic aspect insofar as God could not be compared to man. But there was a specific tradition of laughter about the infidels and disbelievers, an expression of religious triumphalism, which finds remarkable parallels in the Christian world.²²⁶ Already tenth-century authors of Hadith texts enjoyed describing God laughing, granting the blessed the grace of witnessing Him in person. But there were other examples where God's laughter contains mocking, if not sarcastic, elements, rewarding the true believers who are entitled to enter Heaven.

Holtzman emphasizes that we really would have to understand the specific character of the Hadith texts as expressions of oral literature, though we can no longer trace the many accompanying elements, such as gestures, mimicry, or tone of voice by the teller. But as oral literature, the stories enjoyed considerable authority and respect, particularly because of their strong religious content and deep impact on Islamic jurisprudence from early on. Hence we can trust that the references to God's laughter were taken seriously and were fully accepted by many interpreters. In a number of *ḥadīths* God laughs because a sinner recognizes His power and submits under Him, which allows God to grant the poor person access to Heaven after all out of sheer mercy. His laughter reflects His omnipotence and puts the miserable human creature into the appropriate position in relationship to Him. This then also meant that laughter expressed astonishment that the sinner was even able to recognize God and His greatness.

One major issue in the Hadith tradition was the reference to God laughing so hard that His molars and uvula were revealed, which forced the interpreters to investigate very carefully to what extent God could really be perceived in anthropomorphic terms. Moreover, the discussion also centered on the question

²²⁶ See the expressions of laughter, or comic scenes, in the *Legenda auri*, as discussed above.

what the Prophet's laughter could have meant, which was mostly regarded as an imitation of God's laughter. Other issues pertained to the question whether the Prophet really laughed, or whether he only smiled. Some Islamic scholars even questioned the whole notion of a laughing God, but there are plenty of Hadith texts that bespeak the very opposite. In other words, the issue of laughter proved to be a critical component in Islamic epistemology and theology, as Holtzman convincingly illustrates. After all, there always lurked the danger—in fact, the arguments within the Christian discourse was fairly similar in this regard—of committing the crime of blasphemy by attributing human features to God. Significantly, some traditionalist Islamic theologians, such as Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 1328), argued cogently that God's laughter could not represent lightheartedness; instead it reflected His perfection. The traditionalists, in fact, had three possible answers to the innocent question "Does God really laugh?" The first answer was, He laughs, and His laughter is describable in terms of human and physical laughter. The second answer was, He laughs, but does not try to understand the nature or meaning of this laughter. The third answer was, He laughs, but His laughter is not describable and it actually means His benevolence and grace. Nevertheless, as Holtzman's study illustrates, and which sheds important light on many other contributions in this volume, the phenomenon of laughter proved to be highly problematic and required, especially in the religious context, extensive theological debates and hermeneutic analysis in order to recognize and accept the possibility of God laughing.

Although we would normally not expect laughter to erupt in heroic epics which are so powerfully determined by slaughter, betrayal, warfare, and death, early medieval poets have not shied away from discussing the wide range of emotions in their epics as well, as we have already seen above with respect to the Middle High German *Nibelungenlied* and the *Eckenlied*, where concrete scenes determined by laughter, both cheerful and ominous, demand our attention.²²⁷ This is also the case in the Old English *Beowulf* where Daniel F. Pigg, in his contribution to this volume, discovers significant and unsettling moments with heroes breaking out in laughter. Epic poems present us with unforgettable images of heroic society, with their feasts, flytings, drinking bouts, and struggles. When *Beowulf* appears at King Hrothgar's court, the social interactions also include humor, wit, and sarcastic challenges, all captured by various types of laughter, explicit and implicit after *Beowulf*'s defeat of Unferth in their flyting.

²²⁷ Manuel Braun, "Mitlachen oder verlachen? Zum Verhältnis von Komik und Gewalt in der Heldenepik," *Gewalt im Mittelalter: Realitäten und Imaginationen*, ed. id. and Cornelia Herberichs (Munich: Fink, 2005), 381–410.

Significantly, their laughter tends to indicate a sense of insecurity and fear, and also doubt about Beowulf's promise to rescue them from the monster Grendel. The latter, however, also laughs, but that scary laughter finds no echo in any society and is directed only at the monster himself, revealing its total otherness and loneliness. Laughter, according to Pigg, reflects on the fragile hope that chaos will be overcome and contained by the existing heroic world, yet it also anticipates subtle fears that this very world might teeter on the brink of collapse back into chaos, as represented by Grendel's cannibalistic attacks.

Perhaps more clearly than in later medieval texts, *Beowulf* indicates the highly ambivalent nature of laughter which, according to Christian ideals that certainly overshadow this heroic epic, should be suppressed as vain and sinful, although it was, after all, a fundamental aspect of human life that could not be ignored or occluded. Wicked people laugh, as Christian teachers preached, whereas good ones display a friendly but serious attitude and mien. However, it was possible and acceptable to laugh at the Devil and oppressors of the Christian faith, as we have seen above with regards to Hrotsvita of Gandersheim's religious plays.

In his detailed analysis, Pigg alerts us to the highly ambivalent messages contained in the early flyting scene at Hrothgar's court, where the erupting laughter only thinly covers over the destabilizing elements present and the growing loss of identity for the Danes. The members of the court laugh after Beowulf's mighty speech in defense of his honor against Unferth, as if they were no longer facing an existential threat, revealing, perhaps not so surprisingly, how much they have lost already for a long time their sense of honor and do not know how to fight back against the outside threat, Grendel. To note, as the narrator had commented, their laughter had already stopped after the monster's arrival (vv. 123–52), and it returns now only because Beowulf has given them a dubious hope for renewed security. But as we know, and as Pigg discusses in great clarity, that monster also laughs, which is certainly a sign of its quasi human nature, uncannily connecting it with its own still laughing victims that he devours one by one over the years. Nevertheless, it is a laughter directed only inside, despite the intentional, almost rational nature, yet without any social connectivity, which condemns him from the outset as an outsider and monster that does not deserve to live.

Taken together, the three remarkable passages with laughter indicate the precarious fragility of this heroic world where the men at first are regularly described as lying down and sleeping, while Grendel is standing, walking, killing, and devouring. Once Beowulf has finished him off, however, and then has to battle with Grendel's mother, laughter is no longer to be heard because the surviving hero has won all challenges and wiped out the imminent dangers for the entire world of Heorot, taking away thereby previous ambivalence and doubt.

Significantly, Beowulf himself never laughs, but King Hrothgar's people, who have already proven their failure and weakness, do. As Pigg convincingly argues, laughter could here be seen as suggesting the imminent apocalypse, such as when Wiclaf recounts Beowulf's history and his death, which signals the end of laughter, joy, and happiness. Perhaps not by coincidence, in the Old Spanish *Poema de Mio Cid*, we do not hear of any real laughter, though the protagonist is said to smile at times, but then with good reason and justification because deep happiness fills his heart.²²⁸

The degree to which individual situations, people, words, gestures, rituals, signs, or expressions prove to be funny ultimately depends much on the specific cultural-historical setting, as we have already observed many times in our Introduction. Mark Burde, however, setting the tone for the subsequent volume, investigates some of the more intriguing and illustrative ambivalences, intricacies, and contingencies of laughter in the Middle Ages and focuses on our difficulties today fully to grasp what jokes, witticism, humorous exchange, satire, irony, or parody could really mean, or what the intention might have been. Burde at first highlights some of the major challenges we face by reviewing the major theoreticians on laughter from Plato downwards, and then enhances the results by means of a fast paced review of where medieval protagonists laugh and why, about whom, and under what conditions. But in many cases we can laugh about those medieval jokes almost just as much as the medievals, though perhaps with less intensity and interest, whereas in others we might need much more background information until we understand the gist of the joke. The difficulty gains in strength when we consider religious jokes, or laughter about liturgical rituals, hence when we encounter a situation which we would call 'parody' today.

The term "parodia sacra" did not emerge until the end of the sixteenth century, and then did not carry the meaning of 'sacred parody,' as Bakhtin was then to formulate in the middle of the twentieth century. Whether rightly or wrongly, the way in which he perceived the matter was to have a long-lasting and profound impact on modern literary theory until today, and on contemporary approaches to the Middle Ages. In the original context, "parodia sacra" implied the transformation of secular into sacred matter, whereas today, informed by Bakhtin,

²²⁸ *The Song of the Cid. A Dual-Language Edition with Parallel text*, trans. by Burton Raffel. Introduction and Notes by María Rosa Menocal (New York: Penguin, 2009): "Sonrisós' Mio Cid, estávalos fablando" (12; "He smiled and spoke to them," 13). When the protagonist hero welcomes back to Valencia his mistreated and abused daughters again, whose evil husbands, the Carrión brothers had tried to kill them through whipping, he smiles with pleasure and kisses them: "besándolas a amas, tornós' de sonrrisar" (196). See also the excellent online version (with most helpful search tools) at: <http://mgarci.aas.duke.edu/cgi-bin/celestina/sp/index-dq.cgi?libroId=1002> (last accessed on Jan. 30, 2010).

we treat it as the very opposite. Bakhtin, however, was not at all the first to discuss this phenomenon, as Burde's insightful and meticulous analysis of older scholarship (Novati and Lehmann) indicates. Nevertheless, Bakhtin, obviously informed by religious scholars such as Traube, Otto, and Durkheimer, seems to have read specific aspects of this theory into medieval and early-modern literature, perceiving it as a specific disrespectfulness directed against anything sacred. At the same time, as Burde illustrates, Bakhtin seems to have been rather ambivalent about the validity of his own interpretation himself, expressing more than once a considerably dialectical approach to the matter at hand. But laughter within a religious setting has always been an unnerving phenomenon, challenging the authorities and undermining the sacrality of any given situation. It would be inappropriate, as Burde emphasizes, and as we have also discussed at length in the Introduction, to identify laughter as a straightforward human expression without a specific agenda, hidden meaning, or a secret strategy.

I would like to add here that the notorious "Feast of Fools" as practiced mostly in northern France in the thirteenth century and beyond, might have been, as Max Harris argues, "a series of differentiated, but mutually influential, local experiments in Rough and Holy liturgy for the Christmas season,"²²⁹ though he does not explain how this "ceremonial inversion" still could serve to enhance "the cathedral's sacred seasonal purpose."²³⁰

Burde insightfully compensates for this shortcoming, suggesting that the raucous nature of such travesties of the sacred aimed for the confirmation of the religious sphere which was predicated on the dialectics of all life. In other words, the devil's laughter would then have been nothing but the echo of God's holy words, as I would interpret it. More specifically, Burde underscores this aspect by referring to Rudolf Otto's description of the *numinosum* (the sacred) as the focal point of highly dialectic forces. To embrace Bakhtin's use of the term 'parodia sacra' thus emerges as a rather dangerous method because it inappropriately simplifies the meaning of laughter, of parody, and of the sacred, particularly in the medieval context. As the subsequent articles will demonstrate most energetically, each comical situation in medieval and early-modern literature, the arts, and also the countless expressions of public life require careful analysis without relying blindly or naively on theoretical terms that crudely pave over differences and ambivalences that characterize all such phenomena where the religious is made the butt of the joke. Laughter, to be certain, defies all such attempts and demonstrates, over and over again, that we are humans, that is, highly complicated, contradictory, but also rational beings. The analysis of premodern

²²⁹ Max Harris, "Rough and Holy Liturgy: A Reassessment of the Fest of Fools," *"risus sacer – sacrum risibile,"* 2009, 77–100; here 99.

²³⁰ Harris, "Rough and Holy Liturgy," 100.

episodes where people laugh offers the great opportunity to gain new enlightened insights into this phenomenon.

To what extent might the phenomenon of laughter determine gender roles; or could we even argue that men and women laugh differently and about different things, or for different reasons, perhaps in different contexts and under different conditions? Were men at medieval courts more free to laugh out loudly, or freely, whereas women were not (see the example of Cunneware in Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*, as discussed above)? However, we have already observed that the tenth-century Gandersheim nun Hrotsvita had made great efforts to incorporate humor into her religious plays and narratives, both to compete with her model Terence and to outdo him, hence to make available religious drama appropriate for the context of the women's convent and to legitimize laughter for women.²³¹

Nevertheless, medieval didactic literature viewed women's laughter rather critically, as Olga V. Trokhimenko observes in her contribution to this volume, especially since laughter constituted a highly conflictual, negotiable type of behavior that faced both acceptance and rejection, all depending on the circumstances. Moreover, the term 'laughter' itself easily and commonly implies a wide range of meanings depending on the specific context, intention, and motivation, which proves to be a common denominator to all the studies assembled here. In the *Frauenbuch* (ca. 1257) by the Styrian (Austrian) poet Ulrich von Liechtenstein, in which a lady and a knight (probably Ulrich himself) debate the ethical and moral standards of gender specific behavior, norms, and ideals, in contrast to a perceived decline of all of them in society, laughter emerges as a significant topic because it deeply reflects on women's public appearance and evaluation.

As Trokhimenko perceptively recognizes, courtly ladies were expected to provide joy for the knightly audience,²³² yet their subsequent laughter was not supposed to slip out of men's control; otherwise women might actually laugh at or about their male contemporaries—for the male narrator and debater a most dreaded perspective.²³³ By contrast, those women who offered smiling faces and

²³¹ Wolfgang Maaz, "Das Lachen der Frauen vor des Teufels Küche: Ridicula bei Hrotsvit von Gandersheim," *Komische Gegenwelten: Lachen und Literatur in Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit*, ed. Werner Röcke and Helga Neumann (Paderborn, Munich, et al.: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1999), 133–54, emphasizes how much the women's laughter in *Dulcitius* empowers them, and that the Christian God in fact grants them the right to this laughter.

²³² Siegfried Christoph, "The Language and Culture of Joy," *Words of Love and Love of Words in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, ed. Albrecht Classen, 2009.

²³³ This is the specific point of criticism against female laughter in the fourteenth-century *mære* "Die halbe Birne" by the pseudo Konrad von Würzburg (late thirteenth, perhaps early fourteenth century), which I discuss in my contribution to this volume. See also the contribution to this

a happy mood at court would fully meet men's approval, as long as there was no sarcasm, irony, mockery, or ridicule involved, that is, as Trokhimenko implies, as long as they performed according to male expectations and maintained, as the contemporary Thomasin von Zerclaere and also the anonymous author of *Diu Winsbekin* commented, their own desirability for men.²³⁴ But Ulrich's text also entails serious criticism of women's laughter because it contradicted religious teachings that were likewise prevalent at medieval courts and seriously warned about laughter as being associated with carnality and sinfulness. After all, the iconography of the Foolish Virgins at Gothic cathedrals was commonly known, raising a dangerous scepter for women if they indulged too heavily in worldly joys. In this sense, courtly ladies who did not control and subdue their need to laugh could invite gossip and expose themselves to accusations of sexual misconduct.

In the final analysis, Trokhimenko underscores the tremendous contradictions in Ulrich's approach to laughing women, who were expected both to instill joy and mirth in public and to maintain themselves and demur to clerical demands of self-chastisement. For the author the only realistic solution was to proclaim that knights would pay respect to honorable ladies, who in turn would demonstrate submissiveness under the patriarchal rule. For Trokhimenko, then, women were not, at least according to Ulrich, supposed to stop laughing, but they could laugh only within the male dominated public sphere of the courts and in accordance with a clerically inspired value system, basically a *contradictio in adiecto*. The more the didactic writer praised and admired courtly ladies, the more he also demanded from them humility, modesty, and self-constraint. They could laugh, but only if this behavior was approved by the male authorities.

In some medieval romances, such as Heinrich von dem Türlin's *Diu Crône* (ca. 1210–1240) laughter erupts in public and effects everyone present, embarrassing all members of the court over their moral and ethical shortcomings and failures, as exposed by a test utilizing a magical object, such as a tankard (spilling of wine on the guilty one) or a glove (making the person who has committed a

volume by Olga V. Trokhimenko. A fascinating example of a happily laughing wife can be found in Juan Manuel's *El Conde Lucanor: A Collection of Mediaeval Spanish Stories*. Ed. with an Intro. Trans. and Notes by John England (Warminster, England: Aris & Phillips, 1987), no. 44, 264.

²³⁴ Albrecht Classen, "Thomasin von Zerclaere's *Der Welsche Gast* and Hugo von Trimberg's *Der Renner*: Two Middle High German Didactic Writers Focus on Gender Relations," *What Nature Does Not Teach: Didactic Literature in the Medieval and Early-Modern Periods*, ed. Juanita Feros Ruys. Disputatio, 15 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), 205–29. The gender perspective by these didactic writers proves to be quite complex and cannot be simply categorized as patriarchal. Hugo even includes a narrative in which a woman has the final laugh about her highly abusive husband, and in which the author comments rather positively in defense of the poor wife (12934–36); here 224.

transgression not invisible).²³⁵ Madelon Köhler-Busch concentrates on these curious situations in *Diu Crône* to explore a social function of laughter which we do not find in many other genres or texts in the Middle Ages and the early modern period. The Styrian/Austrian Heinrich von dem Türlin pursued many highly idiosyncratic purposes with his romance, whether we think of the focus on the cold winter scene, the protagonist Gawein's curious adventures and explorations, his own quest for the Grail, the appearance of miracle or wonder scenes ("Abenteuerketten"), or the most brutal treatment of the queen who is almost raped if Gawein had not intervened in the last minute. The author heavily drew on older French and German literature, yet his work represents, after all, a most fascinating and unique manifestation of Arthurian literature. Not surprisingly, the communal laughter about the misfortune of others, that is, about almost all and everyone present, including the most sarcastic and bitter court seneschal Keie, constitutes a significant element which Köhler-Busch analyzes in greater detail.²³⁶ From her perspective, Heinrich developed a wholesale critique of Arthurian society, as expressed by this biting and at first truly hurtful laughter, though ultimately everyone laughing also signals his or her willingness to tolerate the others' failures and weaknesses because they are shared among them all.

Whereas most other Arthurian romances focus on the downfall and subsequent restitution of an individual knight, which thus illustrates the fundamental learning and growing-up process of one hero, in Heinrich's *Diu Crône* the entire court is challenged and described as faulty, lacking in upholding its own acclaimed values and ideals, though no one is truly accused of having committed any serious crime.²³⁷ The public laughter aims at the ordinary, perhaps even trifle, moral failures, often of a sexual kind, typical of any society populated by representatives of both genders. Surprisingly, however, as Köhler-Busch rightfully observes, this laughter quickly transforms the individual shame into a general realization of human weakness at large of which virtually everyone is guilty of. In this sense Keie's bawdy and impetuous jokes prove to be hurtful and yet also innocent since the laughter re-integrates everyone despite his and her transgression in the past.

²³⁵ Christine Kasper, *Von miesen Rittern und sündhaften Frauen und solchen, die besser waren: Tugend- und Keuschkeitsproben in der mittellalterlichen Literatur vornehmlich des deutschen Sprachraums*. Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik, 547 (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1995); Ktheleen Coyne Kelly, *Performing Virginitly and Testing Chastity in the Middle Ages*. Routledge Research in Medieval Studies (London: Routledge, 2000).

²³⁶ For an excellent survey of the relevant research literature and the major points of discussion among scholarship, see Markus Wennerhold, *Späte mittelhochdeutsche Artusromane: 'Lanzelet', 'Wigalois', 'Daniel von dem Blühenden Tal', 'Diu Crône'*. Bilanz der Forschung 1960–2000. Würzburger Beiträge zur deutschen Philologie, XXVII (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2005), 182–253.

²³⁷ There are some significant parallels to the anonymous *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, which I have discussed above.

The traditional ideal of social decorum suddenly emerges as a screen behind which hiding is not really possible, but the laughter by the entire audience recovers individual and public honor since they realize how much they are all guilty of very similar ‘crimes’ and shortcomings. In this sense, it would be the best, as Köhler-Busch suggests, to read these trial scenes with their embarrassing and yet inclusive laughter as characterized by carnivalesque elements insofar as transgression is suddenly perceived as a very human feature practically no one can really avoid. As much as the trials expose wrongdoings and breaches of moral and ethical ideals, they all laugh because they recognize themselves mirrored in the others who are charged with such truly human transgressions that should not be pardonable, yet are pardonable within the space of the carnivalesque court.

As Ernst Robert Curtius once famously remarked, “the mixture of jest and earnest was among the stylistic norms which were known and practiced by the medieval poet, even if he perhaps nowhere found them expressly formulated. We may, then, view the phenomenon as a fresh substantiation of the view that the Middle Ages loved all kinds of crossings and mixtures of stylistic genres. And in fact we find in the Middle Ages *ludicra* within domains and genres which, to our modern taste, schooled by classicistic aesthetics, absolutely exclude any such mixtures. This is also true of the literature of the church.”²³⁸ Indeed, if we examine religious texts more closely, such as religious plays or legendary accounts (e.g., *Legenda aurea* by Jacobus de Voragine), we can easily discover the great interest in mixing styles and images, and to match jest and earnest with each other, although many medieval theologians explicitly condemned laughter and regarded humor as a frivolous matter not worthy for man as an early image of the Godhead.²³⁹ The development of the rich sermon literature with the rise of the Dominican and Franciscan preachers since the early thirteenth century, also proved to be a major gateway for humor and laughter to enter public discourse on a broad level.²⁴⁰

²³⁸ Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, 424.

²³⁹ For further perspectives, see some of the contributions to the volume: “*risus sacer – sacrum risibile*”: *Interaktionsfelder von Sakralität und Gelächter im kulturellen und historischen Wandel*, ed. Katja Gvozdeva and Werner Röcke, 2009. Here, Werner Röcke studies laughter in early Christian Gnostic literature from the third and the fourth centuries, then on the debate about laughing in the teachings by Tertullian; Christoph Winterer analyzes comic elements in the sacramentary of Gellone from ca. 790, created in the monastery Saint-Croix in Meaux; Max Harris takes into view once again the medieval “Feast of Fools” as practiced in northern France during the first half of the thirteenth century, which he interprets as an expression of Christian experiments in liturgy; Jacques E. Merceron investigates laughter in French hagiographical and didactic literature from the Middle Ages which “signals access to the sacred” (106) yet refuses simple answers about its ultimate meaning because of the many different situations where it erupts. Most other contributions pertain to secular vernacular texts that were composed in the modern world, or outside of Europe.

²⁴⁰ Jeannine Horowitz and Sophia Menache, *L’Humour en Chaire*, 66–73.

Curtius was right, as Connie Scarborough confirms in her contribution to this volume, focusing on the large corpus of religious songs in King Alfonso El Sabio's *Cantigas de Santa Maria*, compiled between the years 1257 and 1283. As expressive as these songs might be in their general admiration and glorification of the Virgin Mary as the ultimate intermediary between the human sinner and God, they also prove to contain numerous elements determined by humor, irony, and satire. Whether laughter truly undermines the sacred, as some scholars have tried to argue, remains to be seen, but the humorous elements in Alfonso's songs clearly come to the surface, as Scarborough's analysis reveals.

One of the crucial reasons for humor, irony, satire, and then outright laughter seems to be man's fundamental desire to minimize the distance between him/herself and the Godhead, and to draw strength from the metaphysical domain because laughter about, or with, the divine figures in a way pulls them down from their religious pedestal, or presents them in humorous light; hence it brings them closer to human existence and makes them more accessible and receptive to human needs and desires. In some late-medieval religious plays, such as in those by the Wakefield Master, ritual festivities play a significant role even in the most painful scenes of Christ's Passion.²⁴¹ Very much along those lines, Alfonso the Wise regarded laughter as an important vehicle to reach out to the divine and to secure the help so much desired from the Virgin Mary. Scarborough emphasizes how much the king projected himself as Her troubadour, Her servant, perhaps even as Her courtly lover, which entitled him, or his protagonists, to laugh in admiration, joy, or delight about successful collaboration to bring about miraculous healing or solving of human problems.

On the other hand, as some of the *cantigas* illustrate, laughter is also provoked by the behavior of some clerics, thus bridging the gap between the lay people and the members of the Church who thereby prove to be as much part of humanity as everyone else because they are at times as liable in being disrespectful and even sinful as everyone else. Only the urgent appeal to the Virgin Mary can rescue them, which provides the audience with an extraordinary and impressive example of the power exerted by Her. The licence to laugh, hence, serves as a medium to relieve the tensions of everyday life and to free the observers from their fear since they realize, as do we, that they will be safe after all from the devil's clutches despite the countless dangers, temptations, sins, and crimes happening in or determining human existence. She will intervene on our behalf and rescue us in time of utmost need. This deserves a liberating laughter.

²⁴¹ Warren Edminster, *The Preaching Fox: Festive Subversion in the Plays of the Wakefield Master*. Studies in Medieval History and Culture (New York and London: Routledge, 2005). See also Lawrence M. Clopper, *Drama, Play, and Game: English Festive Culture in the Medieval and Early Modern Period* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2001).

Drawing our attention to another level of meaning in comical scenes that are supposed to evoke laughter, Scarborough emphasizes how much some of Alfonso's songs are predicated on the failings of the human body to maintain self-discipline all the time. Immodesty, gluttony, drunkenness, and other transgressions make members of the clergy the laughing stock of the audience of the *cantigas*. At other times slight misbehavior leading to embarrassing situations in which only the Virgin Mary can help the miserable victim invites laughter, once again as a form of relief and also admiration that She will intervene even in trifle, or mundane, affairs and assist both the high-born as much as the low-born, both the intelligent and learned as much as the simple-minded. Even in highly dangerous situations when a person is close to be snatched away by the devil, the Virgin Mary lends her help and rescues him/her at the end, whereupon laughter erupts as a sign of profound happiness that the divine power is not that far away from ordinary human life insofar as God's Mother listens to prayer and rushes to man's assistance when desperation sets in.

Alternatively, laughter erupts when the power of the devil over mankind is made the object of laughter by the Virgin. And then there is laughter by young people and children who are rescued from deadly accidents through Her help in the last minute. Amazingly, there are also examples in Alfonso's *Cantigas* where an abbess prays to the Virgin to free her from her pregnancy. Trusting in the absolute power of the Mother of God, the abbess appears before the investigating bishop, with an honest laughter on her face and is then even found innocent.²⁴² At the same time, as Scarborough points out, racial and religious profiling of Jews also came in handy for Alfonso to create some entertaining, funny songs that invited the audience to laugh about the contemptible, rejected religious minority.²⁴³ Laughter, then, as we learn from this contribution, constituted an essential element in Alfonso's cult of the Virgin Mary who was, because of this humorous approach, made to a closely associated participant in human affairs, although She was still venerated as the Mother of God. By closely assimilating the Virgin Mary to human existence, the audience received consolation and hope, as expressed by the laughter that certainly erupted after many of the songs presented.

²⁴² This finds an amazing parallel in the joking and laughing Isolde on her way to the terrifying ordeal scene in Gottfried von Straßburg's *Tristan* (ca. 1210). Se is apparently so relaxed and unconcerned about the trial with the hot iron — unless she stages a great pretense and only plays this role — because she believes in Christ's support of true lovers who would certainly protect her, as it actually happens at the end: "Îsôt dô smierende sprach: "'welch wunder waere ouch nû dar an, / ob dirre walldne man / mit mir wolte schimpfen?'" (15612–151; Isolde said smilingly: "it would be a miracle if this pilgrim had wanted to make jest with me [to make love?]").

²⁴³ See also the study on the "Judensau" by Birgit Wiedl in this volume.

The borderline separating the serious from the jest can be at times very thin. Sarcasm, satire, and ridicule certainly strongly lean toward the aggressive and barely avoid, if not prevent, the eruption of hostility and violence. Late-medieval Shrovetide plays, for instance, and early-modern carnival spectacles deliberately operated with elements such as ambivalence, allusion, association, and then veiled criticism as modes of expression to interact with the opposite and to formulate dissatisfaction, anger, even wrath, though mostly softly wrapped in literary, or linguistic, strategies of the invective, then also the burlesque, and the parody.²⁴⁴ Laughter and humor have much, if not virtually everything, to do with communication and the human community, as we have observed many times so far in ever changing contexts, social class constellations, and cultural, or religious, circumstances.²⁴⁵

Throughout the Middle Ages the relationship between Jews and Christians was highly problematic, often hostile and violent. But laughter can easily be double-edged, double-sided, and turn the relationship between subject and object upside down, and undermine the hegemonic claim to power.²⁴⁶ Globally speaking, we would ignore an important aspect in the history of Jewish-Christian interactions if we perceived it only in light of Jewish suffering, victimization, and helplessness, or Christian supremacy, subjugation, and dominion, as if the Christian Church actually held complete sway over all of medieval and early-modern society.²⁴⁷ John

²⁴⁴ For older, but still relevant anthropological perspectives regarding the invective, see Marcel Griaule, "L'Alliance cathartique," *Africa* 16 (1948): 242–58. See also Nancy McPhee, *The Book of Insults, Ancient & Modern: an Amiable History of Insult, Inveective, Imprecation & Incivility (Literary, Political & Historical) Hurlled Through the Ages & Compiled as a Public Service* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1978); Amy Richlin, *The Garden of Priapus: Sexuality and Aggression in Roman Humor* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983). See also Nancy Leach, *Insultes et injures pour avoir le dernier mot*. Collection Humour (Outremont, Québec: Quebecor, 2002).

²⁴⁵ See, above all, the contributions to this volume by Fabian Alfie and Nicolino Applauso (on invectives). See also Claude Postel, *Traité des invectives* (Paris: Belles lettres, 2004), and the contributions to *Querelles et invectives : dixième Colloque des Invalides, 1er décembre 2006*, ed. Jean-Jacques Lefrère and Michelle Pierssens (Tusson: Du Lérot, 2007).

²⁴⁶ The number of relevant studies is legion, see, for instance, Miri Rubin, *Gentile Tales: The Narrative Assault on Late Medieval Jews*. The Middle Ages Series (1999; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); and see my review, forthcoming in *Studi medievali*; Robert Chazan, *The Jews of Medieval Western Christendom, 1000–1500*. Cambridge Medieval Textbooks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

²⁴⁷ The pervasive element of anticlericalism throughout the late Middle Ages did not necessarily challenge the entire institution of the Church, instead targeted individuals and specific structures. But laughter was one of its major tools. See the contributions to *Anticlericalism in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. Peter A. Dykema and Heiko A. Oberman. Studies in Medieval and Reformation Thought, LI (Leiden, New York, and Cologne: E. J. Brill, 1993). For an intriguing discussion of opposing groups, or heretics, and their evaluation by the Catholic Church, see Peter Dinzelbacher, "Gruppensex im Untergrund: Chaotische Ketzer und kirchliche Keuschheit im Mittelalter," *Sexuality in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Times*, 405–28.

Sewell here presents a most fascinating and yet extremely complex and challenging case confirming the relevance of these observations, that is, the satirical and irreverent Hebrew text of the *Nizzahon Vetus*, or *Nizzahon Yashan*, "The Old Polemic" (late thirteenth or early fourteenth century). Although the anonymous author seems to employ a serious tone of voice, operating in a very learned theological context, challenging some of the very principles of Christianity, we can read much of this treatise in no other way but as a literary forum to evoke laughter from a Jewish audience about and against their Christian neighbors and voluntary converts to Christianity. But the *Nizzahon Vetus* was composed in Hebrew; hence Sewell suggests that it addressed a Jewish audience virtually exclusively, strongly encouraging them, particularly by means of humor and laughter about the Christian teachings, to abstain from leaving their own fold and converting to the other, hegemonic, religion.

The existence of such a satirical text, if we may call it that, would actually not come as a surprise because the conditions for Jews in western Europe had deteriorated considerably since the time of the crusades, beginning in the late twelfth century, leading to many different forms of violence (hostile accusations, marginalization, expulsion, persecutions, killings, etc.). Nevertheless, in *Nizzahon Vetus* we suddenly come across an, at times, comical response to those deteriorating conditions, meant to distance Jews from their from their enemies and to ridicule them in a rather sophisticated fashion.

The work draws on traditional Hebrew exegetical traditions, citing passages from the Christian Bible, analyzing, and criticizing them in a satirical manner. Apart from the central purpose of objecting to Christian teachings, we also observe that the author (and probably his audience as well), was surprisingly well informed about the neighbors' teachings and practices. The laughter evoked in the text draws on puns and questions regarding the rationality and accuracy of the traditional accounts of Christ in the Gospels, ridiculing certain features and specific comments in the Biblical text. For instance, Sewell points out how much Jesus is described as a disobedient and recalcitrant son, defying his father's commands, which certainly must have invited laughter among Jewish readers, which in turn seriously undermined the theological value of the New Testament as superseding the Old Testament. Jesus is described as the product of Miriam's sordid adulterous affair, and He suddenly appears as a rather foolish figure that needed outside help to achieve His goal as the new messiah.

Sewell underscores, however, that this kind of bold attack against the Christian community indicates a considerable degree of familiarity with basic Christian teachings on the side of the Jewish intellectuals and theologians. In fact, the implied laughter signals an astonishing proximity of both cultural worlds, which necessitated, as Sewell alerts us, for the author of the *Nizzahon Vetus* to embark on a considerable intellectual effort to set up new boundaries against the Christian

community, which in turn provides a good explanation for the deeply ironic tone of voice throughout the treatise.

Some passages even indicate how much the text's author went on the offensive against basic Christian teachings and could go so far as to identify Jesus as a deceiver of whom the Old Testament had already warned when it foretold His future coming. We are repeatedly confronted with warnings that any clever person could read anything into the Scriptures because of their often ambiguous wording and imagery. By exposing representatives of other religions (of course, mostly Christianity) to the devious potential of being deluded in their exegesis, thus making them into the object of laughter, the Jewish author warned his own audience of the dangers of straying from the pure faith. Laughter, hence, serves here as a theological instrument to solidify the own community in faith.

Sewell observes many intriguing parallels between the Jewish and the Christian faith, which obviously provoked Jewish writers, such as the one who composed the *Nizzahon Vetus*, to search for literary mechanisms and rhetorical strategies to fend off the threat of acculturation. In this regard laughter about the others and their 'foolish' misreading of their own holy texts apparently proved to be most effective, or at least most appealing. More specifically, the close interaction with and distancing from the Christian practices reveals how much the laughter in the *Nizzahon Vetus* reflects on deep-seated and also highly realistic fears among Jews of losing their own identity within the dominant Christian world.

Almost the same phenomenon of conflictual emotions can be discovered among many Christians in the high Middle Ages—this might actually be a good explanation for most anti-Judaic and later anti-Semitic expressions—which allows Sewell to argue convincingly that the *Nizzahon Vetus* reflects upon significant heteroglossic (Bakhtin) exchanges and dialogues across theological and cultural dividing lines. The more Jews tried to laugh about their Christian neighbors, the more they indicated how much they actually shared almost intimate contacts with them.²⁴⁸

Laughter also proves to be the basis for picking up stereotypical prejudices by Christians against Jews and turning them into their very opposite, such as the common claim of Jewish ugliness. The term "rebellious ridicule," which Sewell borrows from Michael Billig, proves to be quite applicable here, but only with the proviso that it does not necessarily and always lead automatically to a form of emancipation and liberation from the oppressor. On the contrary, as Sewell concludes, the laughter in the *Nizzahon Vetus* might have also served to protect the own cultural community from embracing ultimately perilous conformity and

²⁴⁸ See, for instance, Elisheva Baumgarten, *Mothers and Children: Jewish Family Life in Medieval Europe*. Jews, Christians, and Muslims from the Ancient to the Modern World (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

acceptance of their marginalized position in medieval society. The Jewish laughter hence could likewise express a sense of fear or the realization that they lacked fundamental empowerment and were in dire need to adapt to the position granted by the hegemonic force insofar as laughter can demonstrate both superiority and inferiority. One can laugh from a position of strength or a position of weakness, perhaps even as an expression of embarrassment.²⁴⁹

That Christians regularly ridiculed their Jewish neighbors throughout the Middle Ages and beyond would not need to be highlighted particularly and has been discussed in a variety of contexts already.²⁵⁰ But the iconic representation of their mean-spirited laughter in the well-known sculpture of the *Judensau*, or the Jews' Pig,²⁵¹ which can be found at many churches primarily in German speaking areas but also in some neighboring countries, such as France, Sweden, Poland, and Switzerland, proves to be highly disturbing, perhaps because of its drastic, mocking, and derogatory nature, its ubiquity, and its reflection of public, Christian, approval of such laughter and hence art work which explicitly served the purpose to denigrate a whole section of medieval society, Jews.²⁵² Birgit Wiedl here discusses the phenomenon from a cultural-historical perspective, probing why the emergence of the *Judensau* was most limited to German speaking lands in the Middle Ages and the early modern period. She observes that Jews are regularly depicted as sucking the sow's teats and her behind, associating the Jews with dirt and with an animal that was actually taboo for them, which underscores the scathing ridicule of the religious minority within the Christian majority.

Wiedl emphasizes the close connection between, on the one hand, a new sense of religious fervor since the early thirteenth century (since the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215), and a new fascination with animals, both beloved and despised, at any rate viewed much more through an emotional prism than before, which made the development of the *Judensau* possible.²⁵³ Curiously, however, the highly

²⁴⁹ For very parallel observations, but regarding situations on the battlefield in late antiquity where a Byzantine, or East Roman, general is facing his opponents and laughs at them, the Goths, see the first contribution to this volume by Judith Hagen.

²⁵⁰ Alexandra Cuffel, *Gendering Disgust in Medieval Religious Polemic* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 2007); see also the contribution to the present volume by John Sewell.

²⁵¹ See, for instance, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Judensau-Wittenberg.jpg>; and for a larger overview, see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judensau>; see also at: <http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Judensau> (great photos). The German version of this article offers even more in-depth information: <http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judensau> (all sites last accessed on Jan. 30, 2010).

²⁵² Isaiah Shachar, *The Judensau: a Medieval Anti-Jewish Motif and Its History*. Warburg Institute Surveys, 5 (London: Warburg Institute, 1974); Hermann Rusam, "Judensau"-Darstellungen in der plastischen Kunst Bayerns: ein Zeugnis christlicher Judenfeindschaft. *Begegnungen*, 90, Sonderheft (Hanover: Evangelisch-Lutherischer Zentralverein für Begegnung von Christen und Juden, 2007).

²⁵³ See now the contributions to *Tiere und Fabelwesen im Mittelalter*, ed. Sabine Obermaier (Berlin and

negative portraiture of Jews in this grotesque image cannot be correlated either to particular Jewish settlements or to noteworthy anti-Jewish violence or pogroms. Hence we face a curious case of a sculptural program with a specific religious message that invited the audience to laugh about an at times almost invisible religious enemy. The specific intention to evoke laughter probably signaled that there was no longer a perceived threat from the Jewish communities that had been either expelled or extremely marginalized.

The fact that the *Judensau* was increasingly placed on the outside wall of churches since the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries underscores the performative character of this sculpture. Whereas the earlier *Judensäue* primarily served as severe and serious warnings to Christians exclusively not to convert to Judaism, the late-medieval examples somehow share certain elements with public theater plays, inviting ridicule, vicious chuckles, and painful mockery. Apparently, this new kind of laughter assumed a threatening tone, signaling publicly that Jews were no longer welcome within the urban space and could be openly belittled, besmeared, and, in extraordinary cases, be expelled. Most disturbingly, as Wiedl observes, at the latest by the sixteenth century lay people were able to acquire their own *Judensau* sculpture for their homes, which would have encouraged them to laugh even in private over the miserable Jews.

While Jews were not allowed to eat pork for religious reasons, their presentation as sucking a sow's teats or kissing her behind signaled, as the author stresses, that they secretly desired to transgress that ban and to ingest the sow in the form of pork as the one animal closest to their inner nature of dirt. Jews were broadly identified with the sin of gluttony, but this could also have been an attempt to divert attention away from Christians' own failings in this regard. As Wiedl alerts us, in the subsequent centuries the imagery of the *Judensau* became widespread, also appearing on playing cards and in broadsheets, underscoring the successful utilization of this iconography for an ever-growing manifestation of anti-Judaism, especially because the masses were instructed to laugh about Jews and to chase them away from their communities. But we might also surmise that with the increasing popularity of the terrible image of the *Judensau*, Christians began to feel more secure and established in their religious position vis-à-vis their religious neighbors and could freely laugh about the minority, which made previously violent pogroms less urgent—certainly a most disturbing realization for us today concerning the devastating and destructive power which laughter could assume at times.

New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2009), though there is no reference to the *Judensau*, of course. For positive attitudes toward animals, see *Tiere als Freunde im Mittelalter: Eine Anthologie*. Eingeleitet, ausgewählt, übersetzt und kommentiert von Gabriele Kompatscher zusammen mit Albrecht Classen und Peter Dinzelsbacher (Badenweiler: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag, 2010).

Numerous Italian poets in the high Middle Ages, such as Rustico Filippi (ca. 1230–ca. 1295) and Cecco Angiolieri (ca. 1260–1312) explored the wide gamut of satirical verses, addressing their audience with amazing audacity and boldness, ridiculing their opponents, mocking women, and formulating their hatred (whether from a rhetorical perspective or not, as a playful strategy or seriously) of their parents and other authority figures. In fact, as Fabian Alfie confirms, Filippi and Angiolieri can be identified as the most outspoken and radical satirical Italian poets of their time. Their often rather shocking form of humor represents a serious challenge for the modern reader since we cannot be certain whether they simply expressed highly nasty opinions about their contemporaries, or whether they aimed for sophisticated sarcasm to entertain their probably already saturated audience and to evoke from them a new kind of laughter.

Italian scholarship actually has tended to refer to Angiolieri's poetry as a benchmark for the full evaluation of the comic element in any literary discourse. While older research considered the specifically oral delivery of Cecco's poetry as a sign that his songs were probably intended only for the socially lower, illiterate class, we have learned to read those humorous songs or poetic narratives as a type of literary expression *sui generis*, appealing to audiences of many different social classes by being deliberately transgressive and aggressive in a playful manner. Orality itself does not say anything about the actual literary quality of any text, not even when the public performance is predicated on rather outrageously humorous images and comments. Humor is present everywhere in Angiolieri's poetry, although he hardly addresses it explicitly and mostly makes the text work out its comic intent through the implicitly satirical operation. Both Filippi and Angiolieri basically rely on *Schadenfreude* when they delight in their opponents' misfortune and failings. In contrast, however, to some of the major authority figures who struggled hard to come to terms with the definition of literary genres in the Middle Ages (from Averroes to Dante), these two poets cared little about formal constraints; instead they deftly employed sarcasm and at times rather bitter satire to play on specific rhetorical traditions and to evoke laughter among their audiences.

To confirm this interpretation, Alfie draws on two examples in Boccaccio's *Decameron* where the metanarrative exchanges among the story tellers buttress the approach taken with regard to Angiolieri and Filippi because here the tales are specifically geared at inciting laughter. Boccaccio even included a tale in which Cecco appears as the protagonist who is badly abused by a friend and fellow traveler, upon which the audience then presumably responds with laughter. In another meta-narrative passage, we are even confronted with a critical discussion about a proper song to be performed, which triggers laughter because of the resulting gender conflict; here basically informed by deep-seated misogyny. Since that misogyny finds its parallel in Filippi's and Angiolieri's poems, and since

Boccaccio's text clearly confirms how much he was successful in arousing the audience to break out into laughter, we can be certain that the often rather surprisingly harsh and mean-spirited poems also aimed for the public's entertainment by means of extreme exaggeration and stylized hatred and pretended irritation, if not frustration about individual opponents or group of people. Despite their obviously highly aggressive approach, in light of Boccaccio's testimony we can now safely assume, as Alfie demonstrates, that the two poets really aimed at live audiences and also knew how much they could rely on intimate exchange with them, as expressed in public laughter, by means of excessive forms of poetic hatred and ridicule.

The richness of late-medieval Italian invective poetry with its dialectics of aggression and laughter allows Nicolino Applauso to extend the investigation of this topic in his own contribution, focusing, however, more on the interrelationship between cursing and comedy in a political context. As the analysis of some of Rustico Filippi's poetry reveals, he intended his invective strategies especially for social and ethical purposes, an approach that subsequently found numerous parallels in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Shrovetide and other plays both in Germany (Hans Sachs) and England.²⁵⁴ In two of his sonnets, above all, as Applauso unearths, the poet combined humor as a palliative with sarcastic, even bitter criticism of ethical shortcomings among the Florentine enemies, thus paving the way for new efforts to establish communicative channels between both sides in the devastating conflict. The laughter evoked by these sonnets proves to be not as biting as we might expect, which hence soothed the pain that could have been caused by Filippi's literary attacks. These attacks, however, as the author reveals, were not specifically aimed at the Ghibellines or the Guelphs, but targeted both sides almost at the same time and identified common problems and shortcomings affecting the city as a whole.

This would explain why Filippi survived in a rather volatile political and military climate in Florence insofar as he expressed his criticism veiled in humor, which characterized him as a political moderate who harbored concerns for the well-being of the entire urban society irrespective of the political orientations. Without predicating his poems on laughter, he probably would not have been able to survive the bitter tensions of his time; hence the humorous invectives

²⁵⁴ See the contributions to this volume by Jean Goodrich and Albrecht Classen. See also Claire Sponsler, *Drama and Resistance: Bodies, Goods, and Theatricality in Late Medieval England*. Medieval Cultures, 10 (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1997); Lawrence M. Clopper, *Drama, Play, and Game*. For Hans Sachs, see Stefan Trappen, "Das 'Gesprech von der Himelfart Margraff Albrechtz' des Hans Sachs: Zur Rezeption der menippeischen Satire im 16. Jahrhundert," *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur* 121.3 (1992): 309–33.

underscore, in a subtle yet unmistakable fashion where the shortcomings rested and who was to be blamed for them.

Nevertheless, as Applauso's analysis demonstrates, the poet cared little to keep the gloves on when he developed his satirical punch lines against whole groups of Guelphs, or Ghibellines, but then also against individual leaders, such as the Pope, who, in the poet's opinion, failed to be a fair mediator and peacemaker because for opportunistic reasons he was mainly concerned with gaining victory in battle. Irrespective of specific points of his sarcastic laughter, Filippi aimed for higher goals, relevant for everyone among his audience, that is, justice and peace. This, however, would only be possible, as the comic allusions to both sides of the political spectrum indicate, if the two parties began to talk to each other and perceived themselves as members of one and the same community, never mind what influence the Pope might try to peddle from the outside. The poet apparently drew on the old tradition of the *tenzone*, in which light-hearted debates couch more serious criticism and yet make it possible to explore the underlying more troublesome conflicts.²⁵⁵

Filippi's sonnets follow the tradition of both oral and written invective as delineated by Cicero's rhetorical manuals and the dictaminal tradition of writing letters practiced during the high and late Middle Ages. The connection between Filippi's poetry and the two practices of *tenzone* and invective (as also confirmed by the manuscript tradition) suggest that these sonnets functioned within a dialogic frame. In Filippi's case we come across an anonymous debater-poet (or an unidentified group of poets) with whom the former tries to engage in a constructive dialogue which ultimately should provide the basis for new political harmony in Florence.

Applauso identifies specific facetious strategies with which Filippi realized his moral and ethical criticism through his sonnets and illustrates how this poet yet succeeded in mollifying this criticism by means of the laughter that he elicited through his use of comical language, allusions, and epithets. No doubt, there are also sexual jokes implied, but the main impetus of Filippi's comical sonnets proves to be, as the author underscores, aimed at moral, ethical, and political issues, which he formulated, however, much more diplomatically by means of poetic laughter than some of his contemporaries who limited themselves to purely political statements in their poems that were then determined either by bitter lamentation or excessive elegy. In simple terms, by invoking laughter and reaching out to his audience by way of lyrical humor, Filippi signaled how to cross

²⁵⁵ For an array of critical discussions of the *tenso* in Old French/Occitan literature, see the contributions in *A Handbook of the Troubadours*, ed. F. R. P. Akehurst and Judith M. Davis (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1995), 204–06, 214, 216–17, et passim).

traditional party lines and to keep the fundamental human needs and values in mind. Applauso shows us how much poetry with invectives and laughter are actually grounded in historical events and pursue political, ethical, and perhaps also moral goals.

No country, no culture, and no literature is devoid of humor and laughter; in fact literature is deeply determined by these two aspects because they reflect so thoroughly on human nature and dissonances in society. To test this thesis, so to speak, Feargal Ó Béarra examines a significant case from late-medieval Irish literature, the early fourteenth-century *Tromdhámh Guaire*, contained in *Leabhar Mhic Cárthaigh Riabhaigh*, or *The Book of Lismore*. Here King Guaire the Generous suffers from the satirical attacks by his court-poet Seanchán and his companions, who tease and challenge him by uttering excessive demands on his hospitality and generosity, requesting gifts that are impossible to procure at that time of the year, which hence humiliates him.²⁵⁶ Magically, Guaire's brother Marbhán, whom we might compare with Merlin, secures all those items against all odds, but then imposes demands on the poets in turn which puts them to shame rather extensively. Nevertheless, they also succeed in completing their task once they have received help, finding the most important legendary tale *Táin Bó Cúailnge* (*The Cattle Raid of Cooley* or *The Táin*), and this experience teaches them never to satirize a king. As Ó Béarra emphasizes, the setting of this text has to be understood in the global transfer of Irish literature produced only at monasteries to texts composed and performed at the courts and elsewhere, at least outside of the clerical world.

The framework of *Tromdhámh Guaire* with its large number of poets involved who all attempt to crack jokes and to ridicule the king also indicates a kind of 'unionization' of poets in post-Norman Ireland banded together by the Bardic Order. We also need to keep in mind that satire on failed hospitality or lack of generosity proved to be one of the most favored themes in medieval Irish literature, which underscores the great cultural relevance of both aspects and the importance to study their satirical treatment. In fact, legal and quasi-religious texts also addressed failure to offer hospitality, which signals how much the literary example finds confirmation in a discourse affecting all of thirteenth-century Irish society.

Ó Béarra draws the significant conclusion that laughter, satire, and humor in general played an extraordinary role in upholding public honor and social values

²⁵⁶ This is a rhetorical strategy that can also be found more commonly on the continent in late-medieval courtly literature, such as in Tannhäuser's (fl. ca. 1245–1260/1265) poetry in which he laments about his lady's unreasonable demands as a price for her love; see Christoph Petzsch, "Tannhäusers Lied IX in C und im cgm 4997: Adynaton-Katalog und Vortragsformen," *Euphorion* 75 (1981): 303–24.

in medieval Irish society, although the poets in *Tromdhámh Guaire* fail in their strategy and are humiliated, in a way, but not without demonstrating in public how much power they could exert. In this sense, the specific example in this study actually sheds light on all other contributions and on the entire debate concerning the nature and relevance of laughter in the Middle Ages and the early modern period insofar as s/he who can laugh easily expresses his/her superiority and personal strength, unless, which is not the case here at all, the laughter only serves to hide fear and insecurity.

Within the Irish context, however, as we learn through Ó Béarra's analysis, fear of being satirized, hence to be exposed as lacking in generosity, for instance, granted witty poets enormous influence and power, affirming how political laughter actually could be, and certainly was in medieval Irish literature, where satire could be meted out in appropriate and excessive fashion. Reading or listening to the account of *Tromdhámh Guaire*, we both sympathize with the poets when they mock the king, and we also despise them when they transgress in that process and need to be set straight again. In fact, true wit and laughter have always been potent and dangerous at the same time. But Ó Béarra also emphasizes the high demands on poets who were supposed to know very specific rules, genres, and examples, hence had to comply with very concrete expectations, which the satirist in general tends to transgress, as happens here.

Laughter in the famous genre of the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century *fabliaux*, which are the topic of Jean E. Jost's contribution, underscores a deeply political dimension of humor in the Middle Ages. Insofar as the social framework in these verse narratives often reflects radical reversals in the usual social conditions, which the sardonic laughter, evoked by the plot development, subtly approves and affirms, we may assume that the authors intended to provide new perspectives for their audiences, though they masked these by way of sexual and satirical allusions and innuendoes. Although the power structure is probably never permanently changed at the end, the laughter provoked by the *fabliaux* signals wishful thinking on the part of the members of the lower classes, particularly in the urban settings, hence the intelligentsia, and definitely the *fableors* themselves. In fact, as Jost demonstrates through a close reading of a selection of these Old French tales, traditional authority figures regularly become victims of their own strategies, they are shamed and wounded, and ultimately turn out to be the butt of the joke.

The criticism or physical injury is commonly directed against members of the clergy,²⁵⁷ rich old husbands,²⁵⁸ and other members of the powerful authorities,

²⁵⁷ For the parallel treatment of the ridiculous clergy in late-medieval German literature, see Birgit Beine, *Der Wolf in der Kutte: Geistliche in den Mären des deutschen Mittelalters*. Braunschweiger

though peasants and their farm hands also receive their fair share of hittings and beatings. But the *fabliaux* prove to be more sophisticated than such a fairly simplistic argument might imply, as Jost hastens to add, underscoring the broadly counter-normative operations, if not open rebellion, that dominate in these narratives, which a Bakhtinian reading clearly brings to light. Those protagonists who create the relevant scenarios which then allow the audience to laugh about typically transgress taboos and undermine social ideals and values, but insofar as they display, at the same time, unusual witticism and intellect, their transgression is easily accepted because it serves, like in all good jokes, for the public entertainment, and retribution against an unjust power system. Jost also recognizes as a characteristic feature that the cunning heroes mercilessly move against their victims and take all the profit they can, often sexual in nature, without suffering any punishment or reprimand because their actions invite laughter and revenge against prior inequities. Neither pity nor moral outrage are the expected reactions, whereas the *fabliaux* are commonly predicated on the delight about sadism and the stupid victims' suffering.

In a number of cases, as Jost comments, the *fabliaux* authors even take on some of the holiest and most pious values and ideals in medieval society, not shying away from granting a peasant, for instance, victory over a saint or even over God Himself, in order to illustrate the fundamental meaning of transgression which anyone could carry out.²⁵⁹ The permission for laughter hence indicates for the audience that traditional social norms might be dispensable or could at least be transgressed for a short time, as was later practiced regularly in carnival and, correspondingly, in carnival plays and other stage productions.²⁶⁰ This could go so far as to ridicule the Church's fundamental dogmas as to God's position in Heaven, but since laughter carries such literary accounts, the creators of these *fabliaux* could generally rely on being appreciated and highly regarded for their wit and humor. These characteristics underscore how little these authors cared for traditional class structures and promoted protagonists who could excel by way of their intelligence alone.²⁶¹ The laughter, however, is provoked not only through

²⁵⁸ Beiträge zur deutschen Sprache und Literatur, 2 (Bielefeld: Verlag für Regionalgeschichte, 1999). Notably, in the *Lais* by Marie de France (ca. 1160–1170) the old, jealous husband also figures quite prominently, but he never becomes the object of laughter, as miserable a figure he might cut in the various narratives. This situation dramatically changes in late-medieval *facetiae*, *novelle*, or *Schwänke*; see Albrecht Classen, *Deutsche Schwankliteratur des 16. Jahrhunderts*, 110–24; Sebastian Coxon, *Laughter and Narrative*.

²⁵⁹ This is also commonly the case in late-medieval and early modern prose narratives, *Schwänke*; see Albrecht Classen, *Deutsche Schwankliteratur des 16. Jahrhunderts*, 2009.

²⁶⁰ See the contributions to our volume by Mark Burde and Jean N. Goodrich. Similarly Scott Taylor, in his contribution, underscores how much laughter at times proved to be highly disrespectful and anti-authoritarian, and could take swipes even at God Himself in a satirical context.

²⁶¹ A parallel phenomenon can be observed in the tales about the witty and irreverent priest Amis,

their often violent and sexual actions, but precisely also through a hilariously transgressive use of language which creates a unique space of freedom where traditional social structures lose their usual values and where basic human (sexual) instincts gain the upper hand.

As Jost and many others have commonly observed, Geoffrey Chaucer was one of the major late-medieval writers who drew on the rich repertoire of *fabliaux* literature, best illustrated by some of the accounts in his *Canterbury Tales* (ca. 1385–1400).²⁶² But Chaucer's literary brilliance was not limited to developing adaptations of this French tradition for his own purposes, as Gretchen Mieszkowski argues in her contribution, focusing, instead, on the characteristic, here almost bizarre and outrageous humor in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* where the crucial love scene is predicated on a number of hilarious, witty, and transgressive actions involving Pandarus, above all. Mieszkowski is careful to distinguish between characteristic *fabliau* humor in the *Miller's Tale*, for instance, which she also discusses at length, and the deft comedy in *Troilus and Criseyde*, where Chaucer indeed elaborated an innovative scheme of laughter without ever resorting to explicit joking. Here laughter is implicitly yet powerfully developed and provoked by the figure constellation and the many allusions to events that must happen in the bedroom considering the contextual actions but are not explicitly identified. Hence there is plenty of room for the reader's/listener's imagination, one of the key components of eroticism and subsequent laughter resulting from scopophilia.²⁶³ Pandarus does not mimic any of the basic comic features typical of the *fabliau*; hence there are no references to pained bodies, scatology, or any other crude form of literary humor. Instead, as the intermediary for the two lovers Troilus and Criseyde, he advocates their relationship, supports and promotes it in strongest terms, and in fact so much that we begin to realize, as Mieszkowski elaborates convincingly, that he joins the love making in a most disturbing, though never quite clearly explained fashion.

the protagonist in The Stricker's Middle High German eponymous collection of tales, *Des Strickers Pfaffe Amis*, ed. K. Kamihara. Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik, 233 (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1978).

²⁶² See, for instance, Peter G. Beidler, "Chaucer's French Accent: gardens and Sex-Talk in the *Shipman's Tale*," *Comic Provocations: Exposing the Corpus of Old French Fabliaux*, ed. Holly A. Crocker. Foreword by R. Howard Bloch. Studies in Arthurian and Courtly Cultures (New York and Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 149–61; Carol F. Heffernan, "Two 'English Fabliaux': Chaucer's Merchant's Tale and Shipman's Tale and Italian Novelle," *Neophilologus* 90.2 (2006): 333–49. The MLA bibliography lists 36 items on this topic alone.

²⁶³ A. C. Spearing, *The Medieval Poet as Voyeur*, 1993; for a psychological approach to this topic, see Vernon A. Rosario, *The Erotic Imagination: French Histories of Perversity* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

At the beginning of Chaucer's long romance, Pandarus appears as an excessive pontificator and talker who imposes himself extremely first on Troilus, then on Criseyde, always working toward rather ambivalent goals, initially allowing the two young people to find each other, and then to get the better of that love affair for himself, as Mieszkowski cogently suggests through a careful and detailed analysis. The more Pandarus attempts to teach his 'disciples' about proper approaches in this matter, the more he cuts a hilarious figure with his endless chattering using proverbs over proverbs, and other run-of-the-mill sayings almost *ad nauseam*. In fact, despite the serious tone of voice, we are obviously invited to laugh about this pedantic teacher who almost makes a fool of himself by overdoing everything in word and deed. Not surprisingly then, as Mieszkowski observes, this master manipulator only seemingly advocates romantic love, but in reality discards it in favor of a highly pragmatic approach to love as a matter of sexual favors and exchange. Moreover, her close reading reveals how many times Pandarus actually plays with sexual jokes, posturing as a failed lover and yet making sexual advances to his own niece Criseyde at the same time which strategically undermines her decorum and prepares her for the unexpected visit at night by Troilus.

The laughter evoked here proves to be built on very complex strategies that easily escape the audience's attention, but at a closer reading they emerge as highly powerful and entertaining at the same time, even if we would have to regard Pandarus's actions as rather unsavory in many ways because he is abusing the young woman for his own purposes, utilizing a trap door for Troilus's secret entrance at night, while he himself even remains present in the bedroom with the two lovers joining in sexual union. In stark contrast to most other medieval accounts of love making which barely touch upon the actual actions, i.e., coitus, Chaucer boldly changes that here utterly and makes both Pandarus and us as readers/listeners immediate voyeurs who witness all details, even though the lights are dimmed and no one is supposed to be around.²⁶⁴ Intriguingly, despite

²⁶⁴ Surprising as it might seem to twenty-first-century readers, in medieval literature people close to the couple often share their bedroom, even when sexual consummation is anticipated. In numerous such scenes, a chambermaid or a female friend substitutes for the wife in the first wedding night because the latter has already lost her virginity and needs to fool her husband. In Gottfried von Strassbourg's *Tristan*, for instance, both Tristan and Brangaene, Queen Isolde's lady-in-waiting, are sleeping in the room where Mark and Isolde are to consummate their marriage, making it possible for Brangaene to take Isolde's place in bed with Mark (ca. 1210); see Karin Lerchner, *Lectulus Floridus: Zur Bedeutung des Bettes in Literatur und Handschriftenillustration des Mittelalters*. *Pictura et Poesis*, 6 (Cologne, Weimar, and Vienna: Böhlau, 1993), 413–26. Cf. also Heinrich Kaufringer's "The Innocent Murderess" (ca. 1400), where the wife, previously raped several times by different men, gets help from her maid to deceive her husband, only to realize at the end, however, that this maid then wants to replace her mistress entirely as the new wife, for which she is also killed (see *Erotic Tales of Medieval Germany*, ed. Albrecht Classen, 114).

all odds, Chaucer succeeds in transforming this drastic carnality into a form of erotic spirituality, badly contrasted by the totally unspiritual context, which triggers even more laughter because of its shocking discrepancy and almost absurd dimension. The more the narrator frames his account with traditional topoi and images culled from ancient love poetry, the more we have to realize, as Mieszkowski alerts us, that Pandarus stays around all the time, which suddenly threatens to deflate the entire idealism of the love affair and transforms it into a sardonic play performed before Pandarus's and our own eyes and ears.

Moreover, as scholarship has observed already for a long time, Pandarus really turns out to be a pimp, and then the erotic set-up in the bedroom could almost be construed as a rape scene, though it is not in the narrow sense of the word. Ironically, Troilus even faints before he can approach Criseyde, which requires Pandarus's intervention, who throws him into the bed and strips him down, an egregious form of comedy, yet on a different level again. We must also not forget, further, as Mieszkowski's reading brilliantly brings to light, as mentioned previously, this dubious go-between uncle is never said to leave the bedroom almost until the very end and yet always pretends to grant the lovers privacy. Whether he commits incest with his niece the next morning, after he has reentered, which some of the lines in the text seem to suggest, remains unclear. Nevertheless, this very indeterminacy, drawing on the *fabliaux* tradition and combining it, curiously, with the genre of the courtly romance, intriguingly enhances the degree of sly comedy that Chaucer created in his romance, so richly, if not devilishly, predicated on double entendres and innuendoes.²⁶⁵

In Sarah Gordon's paper we learn much about the true nature of the Old French *fabliaux*, short verse narratives predicated on laughter, at least according to the seminal definition by Joseph Bédier. These narratives allows us, however, also insight into the oral situation of medieval literary performances, and grant us the opportunity to understand some of the fundamental humor determining thirteenth-century French society. The *fabliaux* would not have survived the centuries until today if they did not constitute highly complex literary masterpieces operating with a large variety of comic strategies ridiculing people, situations, illuminating, or critiquing, a particular type of behavior or misbehavior, and shedding light on moral and ethical norms by way of having the protagonists transgress them deliberately or involuntarily.

In other words, the laughter that erupts through and also within the *fabliaux* proves to be highly complex, as Gordon demonstrates through a careful analysis of six representatives of this genre. Notably, the comic situations tend to be closely

²⁶⁵ See Siegfried Christoph, "The Limits of Reading Innuendo in Medieval Literature," *Sexuality in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Times*, 279–92.

associated with food preparation and consumption, and often are located in areas such as the kitchen and the dining room. This might indicate, as the author suggests, that *fabliaux* might have been commonly presented, if not even performed, during or after festive dinners, or in conjunction with them. Not surprisingly, the oral element and the function of the body are of supreme importance as intradiegetic references to laughter itself and the comic strategies by the *fableurs*; this would allow us describe this literary humor as communicative in nature, as satire, parody, and the comic at large have always been in many respects.²⁶⁶

As we have already observed with regard to many contributions to this volume, outbursts of laughter can carry a myriad of meanings and yet always prove to be deeply human, both in the negative and the positive sense of the words. There are *fabliaux* which are predicated on *Schadenfreude*, leading to a mean-spirited form of laughter, and others that create understanding, evoke sympathy, and establish friendship.

Gordon points out examples where laughter remedies failed communication and overcomes a person's excessive shyness or inability to establish social contacts. By the same token, there are *fabliaux* where the person who laughs—here a woman—gains power over a male voyeur, if not prostitute, establishing a secure distance to the aggressor and threat to her morality. In this sense laughter emerges as a most significant, yet also amorphous and flexible form of human expression, sometimes integrative, sometimes ostracizing,²⁶⁷ and many times rather violent and devious, ridiculing others or belittling them in their ignorance.²⁶⁸ Moreover, as Gordon underscores, laughter structures the world of the *fabliaux* and allows the narrators to highlight individual characters, peculiar situations, and people's ignorance and stupidity.

Comic elements have always lurked around the corner, especially at the most unexpected locations, in texts, visual documents, or sculptures. The Catholic Church has been notorious in its condemnation of everything that smacked of humor and might have incited laughter, yet a careful examination of the medieval Church in its material, architectural manifestations can yield surprising results, as demonstrated by Christine Bousquet-Labouérie in her contribution, focusing on wooden figures in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century canons' stalls, such as those in

²⁶⁶ Hugh Foot and May McCreadie, "Humour and Laughter," *The Handbook of Communication Skills*, ed. Owen Hargie. 3rd ed. (1986; London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 293–322.

²⁶⁷ See the contribution to this volume by Birgit Wiedl on the *Judensau*.

²⁶⁸ This is also the case with the famous *histori*, or narratives of *Till Eulenspiegel* (1510/1511). For a broader discussion of these hilarious figures of pranksters or joksters, see Alison Williams, *Tricksters and Pranksters*, 2000, and compare my studies on *Eulenspiegel*, such as "Laughter as the Ultimate Epistemological Vehicle in the Hands of Till Eulenspiegel."

the Amiens cathedral. More often than we might have assumed, the carvers of the misericords, support hands, and parcloes included hilarious, sometimes sexual, and even pornographic scenes of daily life, such as husband and wife quarreling with each other, touching genitals, exposing bodies, and the like. Some art historians have already tried to fathom this strange, if not bizarre, phenomenon, but no good answers have surfaced yet as to how these grotesque figures fitted into the intimate sacred space of a choir in a cathedral.²⁶⁹

Bousquet-Labou rie affirms the obvious that we are not dealing with laughable objects stealthily hidden away from public viewing, since they were still very much exposed within the Church community and belonged to the public art; and they had to be paid for; hence they must have been approved by the authorities. These wooden images created dissonances, for sure, and challenged all preconceived notions about the serenity of the holy space in the church. But the author encourages us to consider the pairing of earnest and hilarious figures, such as the appearance of the ape, as symbols of man's foolishness and earthly limitations. The kind of laughter triggered by these sculptures, hence, could well have served as reminders of man's physical limitations and of the dangers of human arrogance and sinfulness in face of ever present death.

The appearance of foolishly acting animals imitating human activities in many late-medieval churches and manuscripts was almost a commonplace, inviting the spectator to grasp the ridiculousness of our existence here on earth. To bring home this message, the artists tended to add gross images implying derision and obscenity, at times even scatology, all of which underscored the vanity of our material existence, while the ensuing laughter underscored the pretentiousness of all people as to their universal value within God's plan. We are, so the wooden sculptures seem to indicate, nothing but physical bodies of little endurance and should laugh about any hope to escape the grip of time, or death. Nevertheless, as Bousquet-Labou rie indicates, these carvings do not necessarily aim to scare us out of our minds; instead they evoke laughter which serves to remind us of our absolute contingency here in this life.

Even though these stalls were mostly seen only by the canons themselves, these still must have regularly broken out into laughter, whether as a chuckle or a grimace. The members of the clergy were only too familiar with their own shortcomings, as the many attempts to reform throughout the history of the Western Church indicate, so the laughter created by the wooden sculptures

²⁶⁹ But see Anthony Weir and James Jerman, *Images of Lust: Sexual Carvings on Medieval Churches* (London and New York: Routledge, 1986); they propose a series of possible explanations, including apothropaism, witchcraft, and graffiti, none of which fully satisfy our curiosity. For a powerful discussion of medieval corbels, see Christina Weising, "Vision of 'Sexuality,' 'Obscenity,' or 'Nudity'? Differences Between Regions on the Example of Corbels," *Sexuality in the Middle Ages*, ed. Albrecht Classen, 325–82.

probably allowed the canons to perceive the seriousness of their situation through a satirical lens and understand it in human terms, equalizing them all as sinful people, and providing an antidote to pride and hubris. Intriguingly, Bousquet-Labou rie ultimately suggests that a good laugh could keep the Devil away, while it reaffirmed man's connection to God as the creator of all living beings. These, however, have always been prone to transgression and to sinfulness, which laughter can bring to light unmitigatedly.

One of the most unexpected areas where laughter erupts or where a textual document invites the readers/listeners/observers to enjoy the humorous exchanges among some protagonists proves to be the legal field, facetiously presented in the collection of medieval mock trials (Latin) entitled *Processus juris joco-serius*, first edited by the Humanist and Philologist Melchior Goldast in 1611. In the *Processus Sathane*, possibly attributable to a Bartolo of Saxoferrato, Sathan himself brings suit to God, and a similar issue is dealt with in the *Processus Belial* or *Luciferi* by Bishop Jacob de Theramo, also known as Palladini (1349–1417).²⁷⁰ Scott Taylor offers an intriguing and in-depth analysis of this and similar fictitious trials, examining in how far humor and laughter could have permeated even the legal discourse in the late Middle Ages and the early modern period. In fact, as he observes, from fairly early on, juridical authors had toyed with the idea of Satan, or his lawyer/s, bringing a suit to Christ regarding profoundly theological issues concerning the destiny of man in all his rotten sinfulness, not deserving to be rescued by God. Readers throughout time heavily glossed the manuscripts, demonstrating, as Taylor notes, a considerable interest, despite the sometimes ridiculing comments about the true nature of this kind of hilarious legal spoof with its strong religious connotation.

But from early on the legal profession had been the object of sarcasm and satire, perhaps as much, if not more, as today (see the typical 'lawyer's joke'). Nevertheless, as the author underscores, at closer analysis we may recognize the degree to which the facetious elements consistently proved to have a heuristic value and provided instruction about the procedures at court and a lawyer's appropriate behavior and rhetorical strategies. It might be, as Taylor implicitly suggests, a productive exercise to compare these religio-legal debate poems or plays with contemporary religious plays or Shrovetide plays in order to grasp the extent to which various types of discourses; here deeply determined by satire and laughter, were commonly read or practiced in public for didactic purposes, instruction, and also parody.

²⁷⁰ For a discussion of the fourth French edition of his text, Lyons: Mathias Huss, 19 May 1486, see <http://guenther-rarebooks.com/catalog-online-09/39.php> (last accessed on Jan. 30, 2010). The second German edition from 1473 was the first to be illustrated with woodcuts.

This finds significant confirmation in the generic transformation of the *Processus Sathane*, appearing both in verse and prose, in Latin and in the vernacular, which signals its broader appeal both because of its legal framework and its religious debate concerning ultimate truths concerning the power of the devil versus the power of God. Moreover, we also need to keep in mind that the Virgin Mary appears as the intercessor for humankind, which injects a earthly, mundane sense of existence into the text, facilitating the eruption of laughter over the projection of such holy matters into a courtroom setting.

Taylor unearths a significant dimension of laughter that we have not yet considered or observed elsewhere, that is, a laughter out of relief or as the result of fear that has not materialized. Against Lucifer's best legal arguments, the Virgin finds a convincing defense for humankind and its shortcomings, simply pointing out that people are part of God's collective and hence glorious creation. This then concludes the trial and forces the devil to pack his papers and to disappear. The viewer or reader can heave a sigh of relieve and then burst out laughing because man's worst enemy, if not fears, has once again be defeated and redemption appears to be within our reach one more time. Overall, however, the approach pursued by the composers/translators of these 'courtroom' texts remains a highly unusual aspect of late-medieval and early modern comic literature; here intimately to the legal discourse.

As we have observed numerous times, laughter, or comic at large, implies the whole gamut of human culture, private and public, secular and religious, sophisticated and plebian. In the late Middle Ages, theater plays began to dominate urban cultures, and they were often predicated on laughter, even within the most religious contexts, bringing the *numinosum* surprisingly close to human existence. Laughter might have aggressive intentions, challenging the authorities or standard norms, or it might evoke carnevalesque interests and create stability by expanding the public norms, by granting limited transgression, and hence, ultimately, by reestablishing those very norms and ideals. Jean Goodrich argues precisely along those lines in her contribution, focusing on the Wakefield *Secunda Pastorum*, or *The Second Shepherd's Play* from ca. 1500.

Surprisingly, this play continues to tease laughter out of modern readers and spectators, revealing, so it seems, perennial comic features that address fundamental human needs, feelings, and actions. Undoubtedly, there is plenty of slapstick humor contained in this play, quite a common element in late-medieval drama.²⁷¹ But despite all the chaos, criminal activities, dastardly deeds, and bitter

²⁷¹ For a comparison with late-medieval German plays predicated on humor and laughter, see Albrecht Classen, "Das Hessische Weihnachtsspiel: Ein Dokument der spätmittelalterlichen/frühneuzeitlichen Mentalitätsgeschichte," *Daphnis* 21.4 (1992): 567–600; see also Christel Meier, "Sakralität

complaints by those on the lower social stratum, whose comments and words make us laugh because of their just too human and mundane nature, at the end of the play there is, after all, the miraculous event of the nativity scene, capturing all human suffering and embracing it in a wholesome and sympathetic laughter, including everyone into the religious epiphany as presented on the stage.

Nevertheless, as Goodrich emphasizes, this does not blind us to the actual social injustice and inequality reflected upon by the shepherds and others, although the comic mollifies the harshness of the criticism and subordinates it under the religious narrative. Moreover, insofar as the miserable and foolish farm workers establish solidarity among themselves, they also create sympathy among the audience, which then carries over to the Nativity scene unfolding in front of our eyes. Perceived in this light, we can suddenly comprehend the reasons for the deeply comic character of this play, which allows laughter to erupt even among modern audiences since the conflict between the mundane and the *numinosum* is so familiar and common at all times.

Grotesque exchanges and comments demarcate this play most significantly, and the closer we seem to get to actual religious turning point, the more we are invited to laugh out loud, perhaps preparing us for the ultimate transformation in witnessing the arrival of the Christ child. Order returns, in a way, though still in an elusive trajectory, and the bickering and fighting among the shepherds then comes to an end, probably representing the need for the audience also to repress its foolish aggressiveness and to pay attention to the critical moment of Christ's birth, a moment of mercy, grace, forgiveness, and divine love that promises to reunite all people in a harmonious community. Hence, the play produces, as Goodrich demonstrates, constructive laughter that unmask the frailties and failings of the individuals presented on the stage, yet also invites them all to assemble at the manger and to worship together.

Considering the fundamental relevance of laughter, humor, mirth, and merriment for and in human life, any passage in medieval and early modern texts proves to be most significant where we can observe such phenomenon. Albrecht Classen at first turns his attention to a fourteenth-century Middle High German verse narrative (*mære*), "Dis ist von dem heselin," then to a selection of prose jest narratives (*Schwänke*) from the sixteenth century where the protagonists either break out into laughter or make other people laugh with their facetious, witty, or, in remarkable contrast, dull and ignorant comments. In the *mære*, which relates the story of a young knight who abuses a peasant girl's ignorance about *minne*, or courtly love, and sleeps with her in exchange for a bunny rabbit, he laughs when she demands a third round of sexual pleasures as the proper payment for the

endearing animal, whereas he is exhausted and afraid of being caught by her mother.

But later he invites the young woman and her mother to his wedding, for which no explanation is given by the narrator. Not surprisingly for us, when they appear, along with the bunny rabbit, he laughs out loud once again to the great surprise of everyone, especially because he laughs all by himself without inviting the public to join him in his fun. Especially his fiancée gets anxious and forces him to reveal the reason, and then scoffs at the other woman for having told her mother about the affair. She herself had slept with the local chaplain many times without her mother ever having found out. This shocks the young man so deeply that he immediately changes his mind, dumps the fiancée and marries the peasant woman. As ambivalent and mysterious as the knight's laughter seems to be, it clearly signals how much it contains the key to the entire love story, especially since the nature of his second laughter differs considerably from that of his first one.

As Classen argues, because of the laughter a hidden world of emotions, desires, and dreams opens up, and the narrative set-up actually indicates the way toward a utopian society where love and honor merge and allow the establishment of a happy marriage irrespective of the social class distinctions. The Middle High German verse narrative also profiles the complexity of laughter because its proper interpretation depends greatly on specific contexts and configurations. We might even say that laughter represents the key to the unspoken narrative, or opens up the huge dimension of the meta-narrative, exposing inner thoughts and feelings.

Classen then pursues his investigation of laughter in the contemporary verse narrative "Die halbe Birne," where laughter assumes a much more aggressive character, yet still serves as an epistemological catalyst. But whereas in the former narrative the knight enjoyed a much higher social esteem and could easily control and manipulate the peasant maid; here man and woman are of the same class and bitterly fight against each other until both have had their laugh and hence have exposed each other's weakness in terms of character, education, and proper behavior. Once they have realized that, their alienation and irritation disappear, making it possible for them to join their hands in marriage.

Through the influence of Boccaccio and Poggio Bracciolini, but also as a natural outgrowth of the Middle High German *mæren* tradition, by the early sixteenth century a vast corpus of prose jest narratives emerged, *Schwänke*, in which laughter dominates even more, though here the spectrum of themes, motifs, and subject matters branches out extensively, taking into view virtually all of society, making virtually everyone the object of ridicule and mockery. Nevertheless, as much as in "Dis ist von dem heselin," for instance, the theme of laughter in the *Schwänke* by Georg Wickram, Martin Montanus, Hans Wilhelm Kirchhof, Michael Lindener,

Valentin Schumann, and Jakob Frey, among others, continued to play an extremely important role.

The authors thoroughly embraced the Horatian principle of “delectare et prodesse,” but enriched it with linguistic puns, smart comments, quick verbal retorts, and facetious expressions which regularly incite laughter which rips apart all possible masks and social pretenses. In fact, commonly laughter in the *Schwänke* reveals the truth by demonstrating the foolishness of specific words, behavior, ideas, and values. Of course, the authors regularly emphasize in their prologues that they intend primarily to offer entertainment and to relieve people of their melancholy. At the same time, however, the representatives of this huge corpus unmistakably indicate the extent to which laughter can provide powerful hermeneutic tools by undermining and exposing false pretenses, ignorance, arrogance, and hubris.

However, laughter also erupts many times simply because a speaker has created a brilliant pun, formulated a biting criticism, or displayed extraordinary linguistic skills, which then leads to further enlightenment. Altogether, as Classen argues, laughter serves to gain insight, understanding, and truth, and it allows the individual to reach a deeper understanding of the social context, the circumstances of specific situations and relationships, and ultimately to grasp him/herself much more profoundly than before.

It would be a considerable shortcoming in a scholarly volume on the cultural history of laughter in the Western world to ignore two of the most famous Renaissance classics, Rabelais's *Pantagruel* (1532) and *Gargantua* (1534),²⁷² as gross and disgusting many passages in these works might seem to be for modern sensitivities—actually, many contemporaries also reacted with vehement opposition, yet could not suppress Rabelais's affective and biting humor manifested in his literary masterpieces.²⁷³ In her article Rosa Alvarez Perez at first argues that the combination of scatology, satire, and grotesque in the outrageous

²⁷² Cf. now *The Rabelais Encyclopedia*, ed. Elizabeth Chesney Zegura (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004); see also John Parkin, *Interpretations of Rabelais*. Studies in French Literature, 59 (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2002); for a good overview, with nice images and a solid bibliography, see the online entry at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fran%C3%A7ois_Rabelais (last accessed on Jan. 30, 2010).

²⁷³ Unfortunately, Cervantes's *Don Quijote* has not found particular attention here, apart from some references both in my Introduction and in some contributions. See, however, Laura J. Gorfkle, *Discovering the Comic in Don Quijote*. North Carolina studies in the Romance languages and literatures, 243 (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1993); James Iffland, *De fiestas y aguafiestas: risa, locura e ideología en Cervantes y Avellaneda*. Biblioteca Aurea hispánica, 7 ([Pamplona:] Universidad de Navarra; [Madrid:] Iberoamericana; [Frankfurt a. M.]: Vervuert, 1999); Kurt Reichenberger, *Cervantes, un gran satirico?: los enigmas peligrosos del Quijote; descifrados para el “Carísimo lector”* (Kassel: Edition Reichenberger, 2005).

novel *Pantagruel*, if we may call it such, aims at attacking and ridiculing some of the most sacrosanct institutions in sixteenth-century France, the Church and the University, both of which, understandably, made every effort to get these books banned and suppressed.

Perez focuses on one rather unsavory scene, with a noble lady being made the object of a huge pack of hounds launching at her because Panurge had sprinkled the ashes of a burned bitch in heat on her dress. This, in turn, is curiously made of red cloth which associates her, rather uncannily, with two of the lowest social groups, the executioners and prostitutes, although she certainly pretends to be part of the higher nobility. The male dogs urinate all over this dress to the lady's utter disgrace, creating a scene which Perez, along with other critics, reads as a shocking parody of the Eucharist and of the belief in the power of transubstantiation.²⁷⁴

But the focus of her article really rests on additional humorous elements in this scene where deeply-seated misogyny and significant elements of folkloric culture combine to create the specific type of sarcastic and sexual humor intended by Rabelais. The experience of the Eucharist is transgressively located on the miserable lady's body by means of canine urine, both repugnant and outrageously hilarious, especially because despite her noble appearance and fake demeanor, the narrator has provided enough clues for us to recognize her as a person is only masquerading.

Significantly, Panurge observes the foolish woman's suffering from the not too far distance and strategically turns into, along with us, a chuckling voyeur who delights in the humiliation of this female representative of high society. First and foremost, this can be seen as a sardonic parody of courtly love per se, such as in Petrarch's veneration of his beloved Laura, watching her from a position far removed, and yet longing to be unified with her.

Moreover, Rabelais makes us laugh about his misogynist joke insofar as the narrator, for instance, emphasizes strongly the use of female genitalia for the defense of a city by exposing them to the enemy, and then, in our scene, casts this noble lady as a silly puppet who only pretends to be religious and yet uses the religious ornaments for beautifying herself to attract male attention, almost like the Prioress in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. Simultaneously, Rabelais created a highly sophisticated linguistic pun on the huge number of dogs chasing the victimized woman, which might imply that he regarded her as a prostitute, whereas the dogs could be read, drawing on another pun, as symbolic representations of the Dominicans, who are, just like the dogs, already present in the church.

Perez, however, goes one step further and suggests that Rabelais might have intentionally substituted the dogs' semen with urine, signaling, which would

²⁷⁴ For an intriguing parallel with a lady deeply humiliated in a scatological context, a typical bathroom joke, see the contribution to this volume by Elisabeth Chesney Zegura.

really not be that far-fetched, Panurge's transfer of desire from the sexual experience to revenge since the lady had repulsed him. This then leads to the important realization that this male protagonist has a problem with his sexual prowess, being forced, so to speak, to replace the power of his genitals with the power of his tongue, thus revealing a certain degree of impotence, which thus would explain his use of the dogs who sprinkle urine on the lady's dress, but not their semen!

The overemphasis on the codpiece also signals significant fear on the man's side of lacking in sexual identity, which confirms Perez's astute reading of this specific scene with the dogs serving as representatives of gender troubles. These are cunningly compensated by drastic humor predicated on the protagonist's worry about sexuality insofar as he instrumentalizes this multitude of dogs to avenge his defeat at her hand. His impotence finds critical expression, once again, in the fact that the dogs asperse only urine instead of semen. The enormous laughter provoked by this intriguing episode in *Pantagruel* mercilessly reveals male fear of uncontrollable and overpowering female sexuality.

In order to understand fully what a specific type of laughter might mean, we have to pay very close attention to the social context, the communicative situation, and the relationship among those involved in a specific framework which has triggered laughter. One such case can be found in *nouvelle* 54 in Marguerite de Navarre's famous *Heptaméron* (published posthumously in 1558 and 1559), which Elizabeth C. Zegura analyzes in her contribution to this volume. In one of the narratives a husband tries to commit adultery, but his wife observes him and the servant girl in time and breaks out in a guffaw. This has the desired effect, bringing the husband back to reason, since he inquires about the cause of this laughter and then remembers his true love for his wife.

Given the social, political, religious, and moral turmoil in Marguerite's time, which was witness to endless military campaigns, and considering that the author also composed strongly religious texts (especially her *Miroir de l'âme pécheresse* and *Chansons spirituelles*), this guffaw provokes further investigation. The husband's inquiry into his wife's curious behavior becomes our own quest to grasp the deeper level of meaning of laughter, leading to some fundamental questions: Is it a hysterical laugh, a contemptuous one, or an expression of desperation? Considering the large number of narratives in the *Heptaméron* where laughter erupts about a wide variety of situations, we simply have to accept that laughter represents a multi-causal and highly complex phenomenon that defies all attempts at a straightforward explanation, both in the Middle Ages and ever since (see above for countless examples; medieval people were not, naively put, simple minded or infantile, especially not when they broke out in a peal of laughter). After all, the often comic narrative situation is predicated on a deep sense of

tragedy, as the framework of the story-telling set-up in the mountains after a catastrophic thunderstorm indicates. As Marguerite has her story tellers say repeatedly, when conditions have become too dark and desperate, comic relief is a necessity; hence laughter counterbalances, at least in the author's mind, the doom and gloom of life turned sour, insofar as it can be curative and transformative, which Zegura convincingly connects with some of the major modern theories on laughter (Freud, Bergson, Bakhtin).

In other words, laughter reflects both humor and pathos, yet powerfully bridges both. Zegura confirms her observations through the analysis of additional narratives in the *Heptaméron* where the complex structure underlying laughter emerges every time, addressing sinfulness, but really playing on the semiotic challenges in human relationships. Laughter certainly exposes wrongful behavior, silly words and actions, stumbling and odd appearance, but it does not linger on those minuscule, irrelevant, and jarring shortcomings in people's lives. Instead, it opens a window toward the ethical beauty of joy as one of the central values of good, courtly manners, underscoring the dialectics of human existence.²⁷⁵ The female protagonist who laughs exposes the husband's foolishness without jettisoning him from her marriage and life. By laughing she, like other characters, deconstructs misconceptions, erroneous assumptions, and false ideas about the value of transgression, without operating on an aggressive, hostile level. Insofar as the lady laughs, she demonstrates her ability to perceive her social environment both orally, visually, and intellectually, and thus she can quickly regain the commanding position within her marriage. Laughter thus emerges as the critical catalyst to establish community and to heal the rifts among people, particularly within married life.²⁷⁶

Considering that 'laughter' comes to the surface in so many literary and visual manifestations throughout the Middle Ages and the early modern age, we cannot ignore one little studied, but certainly important genre profoundly determined by humor and laughter, the *sottie*. The *sottie* was a form of entertaining, satirical dialogue for theatrical performance, developed in France and also in the French speaking area of modern-day Switzerland (Geneva) between the mid-fifteenth and

²⁷⁵ This finds a remarkable parallel to the ideal of the "joie de la curt" as discussed by Chrétien de Troyes in his *Erec* and by Hartmann von Aue in his version, closely modeled after Chrétien's text; see Siegfried Christoph, "The Language and Culture of Joy," (2008), 319–33.

²⁷⁶ The degree to which marriage was of prime importance in early-modern public discourse finds also full confirmation in the vast body of sermon literature; see Albrecht Classen, *Der Liebes- und Ehediskurs vom hohen Mittelalter bis zum frühen 17. Jahrhundert*. Volksliedstudien, 5 (Münster, New York, Munich, and Berlin: Waxmann, 2005). The vast body of contemporary German jest narratives (*Schwänke*) also focused intensively on conflicts between the marriage partners, often predicating the treatment of their differences on laughter. See my contribution to this volume, and also my monograph *Deutsche Schwankliteratur des 16. Jahrhunderts*.

the mid-sixteenth century.²⁷⁷ In her contribution to this volume Lia B. Ross offers a thorough discussion of the origin and development of this genre, which was also combined with music and acrobatics, but which has escaped so far the full grasp of scholarship despite numerous attempts in recent years. There is no doubt that the authors of the *sotties* aimed some of their jokes at the members of the upper society, but they also included references to contemporary events, which makes it difficult for us to understand fully the goal or purpose of the satire or irony contained in a *sottie*.

Ross emphasizes that of the many theories concerning laughter, the one that emphasizes the sense of superiority over another person who is made the butt of the joke (Bergson) seems most pronouncedly at work here. Yet, she also considers a number of other theories, some of which place great value on the emotions, the sense of aggression, and on the desire, or need, to gain relief of stress and tension, all of which might play a significant role in the performance of *sotties*. The problem for us as modern interpreters consists of the distance to the original enactment, transforming us from being a relaxed audience primed to enjoy a humorous scene on the stage and ready to laugh at ourselves or some authorities, to critical learners, anxiously bent on trying to decipher the full meaning of a *sottie*. Thus we become blind to the intricacies of early-modern humor which operated, as is probably very much the case even today, within the framework of insider jokes based on allusions and personal knowledge of individuals and conditions to which we are no longer privy.

Significantly, however, this is often the case with jokes or humorous texts, which has led Karl Bertau to the important insight that some scenes in medieval literature that are destined to evoke laughter might not mean anything for us anymore today, or rather, that medieval—and early-modern ones respectively—writers might have revealed more of a modern subjectivity than most medievalists—or early modernists—might be willing to concede.²⁷⁸ Only when the cultural framework and the mental-historical background are pretty much the same, when there is a considerable degree of congruity, do people have a good chance to laugh about the same joke.²⁷⁹ But our distance to the world of late-medieval and early-

²⁷⁷ In many reference works, older and more recent, the genre of the *sottie* is not even mentioned; see, for instance, Chris Baldick, *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (1990; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). But the exception to the rule proves to be Patrizia Romagnoli's article "Sotie," *Le Dictionnaire du Littérature*, ed. Paul Aron, Denis Saint-Jacques, and Alain Viala (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2002), 563–64. See also Lynette R. Muir, "France," *The Medieval European Stage, 500–1550*, ed. William Tydeman. Theatre in Europe: A Documentary History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 279–349; here 329–38.

²⁷⁸ Karl Bertau, "Versuch über tote Witze bei Wolfram," id., *Wolfram von Eschenbach: Neun Versuche über Subjektivität und Ursprünglichkeit in der Geschichte* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1983), 60–109 (orig. published in 1973).

²⁷⁹ Surprisingly, in the seminal volume *Europäische Mentalitätsgeschichte: Hauptthemen in*

modern France seems almost too great to fathom the humor that determines the *sotties*.

Nevertheless, despite all these difficulties, Ross endeavors to explore the complexities of humor in these comic dialogue scenes in order to extract important cultural-historical information as reflected in and refracted through the lens of the *sotties*. In clear contrast to many other humorous scenes and settings, both on the theater stage and in narratives, such as *Till Eulenspiegel* (first printed in 1510), the fool assumes a pivotal role and orchestrates the entire dialogic episode.²⁸⁰ It seems most likely that young law students, or those in neighboring disciplines, pursued *sotties* which allowed them to satirize their authority figures. But whatever the actors' background might have been, it is still very difficult to identify the audience. This, however, would be the same problem we face with late-medieval drama at large; hence, if we can draw from the analogy, we might argue that the urban setting probably provided the essential social stage also for the *sotties*.

Ross then raises the next vexing question why the *sotties* did not find any significant parallels in Europe outside of France, although there similar military and political problems dominated the everyday scene. Perhaps, as the author suggests, in France the more immediate impact of the military conflicts on the larger population might have given rise to the *sotties*, though this would require that this genre and the implied laughter pursued particularly political, social, and ethical goals. This in turn would explain the dominance of the ambivalent language that only contemporary audiences could easily understand, whereas for us the humor of the *sotties* often seems lost. However, as Ross successfully demonstrates, a careful reading of the textual development allows us to comprehend at least in an approximate fashion how some of the *sotties* were performed, by what gestures, signs, and verbal exchanges, which often did not quite make all that much sense if not informed by parody and bizarre travesty of ordinary communication.

In remarkable contrast to many other contemporary comical texts, such as the *farce* or the *histori* in the German context (*Till Eulenspiegel*, see also the countless *Schwänke*²⁸¹), the authors of *sotties* hardly resorted to obscenities or scatology, perhaps because their witty, but sometimes also nonsensical verbal exchanges were rich enough to provoke laughter, making the use of more coarse types of

Einzeldarstellungen, ed. Peter Dinzelbacher. 2nd rev. and expanded ed. (1993; Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner, 2008), only the topic of 'joy' (Freude), along with sorrow and suffering, comes close to our research interest here. But 'laughter' is really not to be equated with 'joy' at large. For an in-depth investigation of 'joy' in its cultural context and its linguistically amorphous manifestations, see Siegfried Christoph, "The Language and Culture of Joy."

²⁸⁰ Yona Pinson, *The Fool's Journey: A Myth of Obsession in Northern Renaissance Art* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008). See also the contribution to this volume by John Alexander.

²⁸¹ Albrecht Classen, *Deutsche Schwankliteratur des 16. Jahrhunderts*.

laughter unnecessary.²⁸² The term 'surreality,' as employed by Ross, might actually best capture the unique character of the *sotties*, since they drew on specific historical or social conditions, but developed their jokes in a highly esoteric, rather intelligent fashion. That is the very reason why we have such a hard time understanding them today.

Sacred parody has been a major aspect in medieval and early-modern civilization ever since the establishment of the Catholic Church in late antiquity. Although the term might need some qualifications and a critical examination before we can fully apply it, as Mark Burde alerts us in his contribution to this volume, the term itself continues to be of great heuristic value even in sixteenth-century literature, as Kyle DiRoberto illustrates with her careful and sensible reading of Robert Greene's *Groatsworth of Wit* (1592). Here we observe a sardonic ridicule of Puritan deathbead conversions, which operates particularly well because Greene successfully approaches his task with great care and subtlety, yet also with harsh parodic intentions and explicit challenges of the Puritan authorities.

Whereas previous scholars have tended to read his text more or less at face value, without comprehending the satirical messages between the lines, DiRoberto successfully unearths the poet's comical approach to ridicule the traditionally Puritan anti-theatrical attitude toward stage performances. Greene can be regarded as a moderate Protestant who acerbatingly drew on the wide range of strongly Puritan genres and employed them for his satirical text that received much inspiration from the world of the Carnival and utilized many of its essential features, such as sacred parody. In this regard he picked up a rich tradition that actually had led to the Protestant Reformation and continued to be of great effect for a number of years, but had not fully been embraced by English religious writers during the later sixteenth century.

In fact, as DiRoberto observes, with the rise of orthodoxy both on the Continent and particularly in England, the anti-theatrical opposition had gained considerably in strength, which consequently became the basis for Greene's highly sophisticated satirical collection of pamphlets. His work strongly contributed to the literary battle for freedom of expression in public (in the theater and elsewhere) that raged in the 1590s. However, even most recent research on his *Groatsworth of Wit* emphasizes the sincerity and deep feelings of his confessional texts and ignores the clear signals of parody and satire, which are, as DiRoberto uncovers through a careful reading of the text, rather evident and almost self-explanatory.

The more Greene endeavored, so it seems, to express repentance according to public standards, the more he undermined the very nature of this genre and

²⁸² Ross rightly notes the not too far-fetched parallels with the hilarious episodes in any of the Monty-Python movies.

ridiculed some of his contemporary writers who seriously delved into this kind of religious treatise, subservient to stout Puritan ideology. In her study, DiRoberto brings to light the various parodic strategies pursued by the author, who harbored little hesitation to laugh at his fellow *litterati* who ardently believed in the Puritan concept of how to prepare for the afterlife. He went so far as to make a mockery of their publications, exposing them to public laughter by creating a farce predicated on the literary elements utilized by his opponents in all naiveté and religious simple-mindedness.

Liberal drawing on Biblical texts—especially the parable of the Prodigal Son—and other sources, Greene succeeded in exposing the anti-theatrical Puritans as sycophants and hypocrites. His technique consisted of inverting some of the basic features in his source, which in turn was supposed to shed light on the double standards practiced by Puritan society.

The comedy in *Groatsworth of Wit* can even be associated with a biting criticism of the emerging capitalistic society and mentality, aggressively targeting the Puritan authorities of his time. Moreover, as DiRoberto suggests, Greene intended to recover the multivocality of the early-modern self in clear contrast to the Puritan ideology making the individual beholden to Christian values in an almost totalitarian manner. The more Greene resorted to the genre of the autobiography, the more we are invited to recognize the satirical mask, a mask which the writer obviously borrowed from the world of the Carnival.

To what extent did early-modern Netherlandish artists explore the meaning of humor, and was it even relevant to them? This is the question with which Martha Moffitt Peacock begins her contribution to this volume, inviting us to examine with her what to make of the numerous caricatures, grotesque, and bizarre figures, such as the vicious shrew, in paintings of that time, apart from their rather apparent didactic purpose, on which art historians have heretofore mostly focused. After all, are we to take the ubiquitous figure of the foolish and boorish peasant as representative of prevalent moralization strategy? But what would we have to make of the very popular image of the termagant vile, old woman who seems to exert absolute control in marriage, threatening the poor humbled husband with violent treatment if he does not obey her commands? As Moffitt Peacock can convincingly demonstrate, drawing on a variety of recent research, early-modern Netherlandish culture was certainly characterized by a lot of humor as well, as reflected by jokes, puns, caricatures, and countless other manifestations of the comic in print and visual representation. Much of Pieter Brueghel's work, for instance, lived from the deliberate integration of humorous elements, which powerfully enhanced their realistic, and also allegorical, content, such as in his *Dulle Griet* painting from 1661. Many times the appearance of a fool or joker

underscored the laughable meaning, inviting the audience to enjoy the images for their light-hearted entertainment.

But the laughter evoked by some of the termagant women obviously reflected social reality as well, as Moffitt Peacock demonstrates through numerous references to women's powerful position in seventeenth-century Netherlandish culture, which many travelers from outside actually observed with astonishment. Whereas in the late Middle Ages misogyny seems to have reached unmatched heights—see the *Querelle des femmes*—and hence the male-dominated gender conflict, the highly popular artistic motif of the threatening and domineering wife, commonly promulgated in late sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Dutch art and literature, seems to address the very opposite, if not simply reversed, situation, with women actually having gained in power and influence, threatening, in a way, Dutch men's sense of masculine identity and self-consciousness.

An illustrative example would be the artistic preference for the image of the hen-pecked husband who has involuntarily taken on a wide variety of household chores upon his wife's order. The struggle for who can wear the proverbial trousers at home finds full expression in many contemporary art works, obviously evoking, because of its strongly comic nature, deeply-seated fears among the male audience. Moffitt Peacock connects this phenomenon with the impressive role played by many, mostly bourgeois, women during the Dutch Revolution against the Spaniards, who gained much respect in public life, as expressed, for instance, by catalogues of female heroines—Kenau Simons Hasselaer being one of the most famous—who were even received at court and granted extensive privileges usually preserved to men.

The military and political history in the Netherlands had apparently undermined traditional gender roles, suddenly ceding to women a much higher position in public esteem than ever before. This had, as Moffitt Peacock rightly underscores, tremendous consequences for the traditional house father, or patriarch, which contemporary artists quickly recognized and utilized for their caricaturist art, encouraging their audience to laugh with them about the pervasive transgressions and reversals of gender roles. Nevertheless, the heroizing of patriotic Dutch women reached unforeseen heights during the seventeenth century, as reflected by dramatic performances, prints, and accompanying inscriptions glorifying women warriors' accomplishments in defending the fatherland (*vrouwen lof* or praise of women). All this had tremendous consequences for women's social, economic, and political roles in the Dutch Republic, deeply affecting, for instance, their position within marriage where they gained unparalleled levels of equality compared to all other women in early-modern Europe. Perhaps not so surprisingly, this led to the phenomenon that increasingly men assumed traditional female functions within the household and then even experienced, on occasion, physical punishment at the hands of their wives. Little

wonder that certain groups of men raised their voices against this threat and engendered a discourse warning their contemporaries of the dangerous, tyrannical, female who wears the trousers in the marriage.

The hilarious, often highly satirical caricatures, however, which Moffitt Peacock discusses in her paper, did not only reflect a broad topical discourse, but were apparently based on real fear by men in response to concrete social, material changes in their lives. Laughter, in this context, apparently reflected a highly conflictual phenomenon, revealing the deep tensions between, on the one hand, respect for those women who enjoyed new power and authority and profound fear of them by the men, on the other, Amazon warrior women and powerful and energetic wives successfully thrived in the early-modern urban world of the Netherlands and gained new legal and social privileges unknown to women throughout the Middle Ages anywhere in Europe. They married considerably later, gaining income instead, whereas men tended to sink into debaucheries and resorted to drinking parties, reducing their sexual prowess, at least in the opinion of some travel authors and numerous caricaturists.

Not surprisingly, this triggered male paranoia about the fundamental loss of their traditional patriarchal roles, which in turn invited the contemporary artists to draw on these sentiments and make their audience laugh because the visual depiction of a world turned topsy-turvy had a long tradition and had been a staple in comic literature and the arts. The difference, however, between the medieval discourse and the one here identified by Moffitt Peacock rests, for instance, in the absence, or rather impossibility, of male retribution, the wide-spread popularity of this theme, and its material foundation, signaling, altogether, that traditional patriarchy actually had lost the struggle insofar as men had turned into the butt of the public joke while women emerged ahead in this ancient-old gender battle. The visual comedy thus represented a vigorous attempt to reverse female dominance in the Dutch Republic, soon enough also paralleled by contemporary writers who reflected upon women's courageous involvement in the Revolution both with praise and satire out of a deep sense of unease about this new development.

Moffitt Peacock also recognizes specific strategies by some artists to equate women's assumption of power over their men with political troublemaking that threatened the unity and strength of the United Provinces. In that sphere, however, the argument regularly is directed against foolish, drunkard old husbands who squander the family income in the tavern and thus set the stage against their own will for their wives giving them a solid thrashing and to assume the control in private and public as a punishment for their evil behavior. The satire involved here could be read, as Moffitt Peacock suggests, as an attempt to remedy and control men's behavior for the improvement of the entire society still suffering from the shock of the Revolution against Spain. The laughter in countless prints

and other images strongly encouraged male viewers to distance themselves from male foolishness and to avoid losing their proverbial trousers to their wives, which would thus constitute an attempt to reestablish traditional patriarchal society.

Overall, however, as Moffitt Peacock concludes, seventeenth-century Netherlandish art and literature reveals a considerable renegotiation of the customary gender roles, starkly reflected through prevalent sartorial comedy predicated on the apparently on-going and concrete physical, perhaps even violent struggle between men and women for dominance in a world where the latter had actually gained great respect for their military accomplishments during the war. The laughter that we encounter everywhere clearly indicates the extent to which men indeed faced serious challenges and had to accept, willy-nilly, a major transgression of patriarchal power structure.

We would normally not associate John Milton with humor and laughter, with cracking jokes or witticism, considering the somber tone of his *Paradise Lost*. Nevertheless, in his young years as a student in Cambridge where he was regularly teased for being too 'female' in his performance and academic dedication, he was also invited at one point to serve as master of ceremony (MC) for a ritual called "salting," which lower classmen were accepted into the upper level. The master, or Father, was supposed to 'salt' the younger students, making them the butt of the jokes, satirizing them and entertaining the audience thereby. And the lower classmen were also expected to deliver Latin oratories demonstrating their qualifications for the promotion.

In his *Prolusion VI*, significantly divided in a *Oratio* and a *Prolusio*, Milton entered into a complex and noteworthy discourse on the entire process, his personal role as MC (Master of the Ceremony), and on the tensions between his own previous identification as too 'feminine' and his actual intellectual potentials, associating him with the 'masculine.' Jessica Tvordi utilizes the fantastic opportunity provided by Milton's *Prolusion VI* to probe quite deeply the essential features of laughter and comic within the wider context of Milton's biography and his later writings. Whereas Olga V. Trokimenkho had explored gendered laughter in her study on Ulrich von Liechtenstein's thirteenth-century *Frauenbuch* as a means of gender control, Tvordi examines how Milton struggled to stifle gendered laughter among his audience by presenting himself in his role as MC as a specifically male-gendered speaker, emphasizing the supreme role of philosophy, rhetorics, and theology within the framework of the Latin oratory arts—all essential features of an advanced Cambridge education.

As Tvordi observes, Milton successfully combined at least two roles in his oration, assuming the role of the bawdy Father in the salting ritual, and also the role of the serious, chaste, and intellectual senior student bent on learning exclusively. In her critical analysis Tvordi discovers how much Milton managed

to turn the tables on his classmates and undermine their concepts of what constitutes true gender identity, laughing first with, but then against, or about them. His speech illustrates quite intelligently how laughter can first be directed at oneself to put the satirical dimension into the right context and then to protect the speaker from personal attacks from the audience; but subsequently Milton focused on his audience and their satirical perspectives toward him, ridiculing their expectations and assumptions by demonstrating his own intellectual superiority and rhetorical mastership.

Moreover, Tvordi unearths Milton's mastery of combining the bawdy with the jovial, the satirical with the polemical, which truly reveals how much a comic performance belongs to the central skills in rhetorics and many, if not most, intellectual endeavors. Milton's self-deprecation emerges as one of the central critical strategies to invite laughter and yet also make possible the establishment of a community including the comedian/orator and the audience. As much as Milton played with perceived gender roles and his own ridicule because of his scholarly fastidiousness, as much he also demanded the audience to recognize the artificiality of those gender masks, which hence reaffirmed his own masculinity by way of his oratory brilliance.

A truly fascinating comment also proves to be Milton's argument that only a full and uninhibited laughter would truly express an individual's concern or self-concept, whereas the opposite would reveal shades of embarrassment, insecurity, and lack of understanding of life's intricacies. In order to achieve that goal, the orator pulls all registers of a comedian, not holding back in ridiculing, satirizing, and ironizing members and groups of the audience. This way Milton redirected the attention away from himself toward the former, making them the objects of laughter from which there is suddenly no escape, very much in the way modern-day stand-up comedians achieve their goal of entertaining the audience by making them laugh at and about themselves. While the audience had first laughed at the Father of the oration, Milton, who had at that moment cast himself as a buffoon without clear gender demarcations in himself, he now ridicules the audience for its assumptions that grammatically they could have confused genders and regarded him as a female.

In a brilliant fashion, as Tvordi elucidates, the author signals how much oration was predicated on the comic and drew on its fundamental strategies to achieve sometimes completely different goals.²⁸³ But while the audience had first laughed about the instability of Milton's gender identity, he now rejects those narrow

²⁸³ In a way we might recognize in the orator Milton the modern-day TV and movie personality, Woody Allen who makes us laugh about his played out personal insecurity because we see our own insecurity played out on the stage. See also the character Cyrano de Bergerac in Edmond Rostand's eponymous play from 1897. For the relevant background and plot summary, see online at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cyrano_de_Bergerac_%28play%29 (last accessed on Jan. 30, 2010).

definitions altogether and opens a significant window toward a much more flexible approach in this regard. Laughter, in other words; here reveals its liberating force, freeing the individual from the traditional bonds of highly restrictive and limiting gender terms.

Laughter and humor represent fundamental responses to everyday life situations, and without them man would not have the necessary release valves for inner tensions, fears, anger, and other emotions. This is, of course, the overall fundamental observation informing all contributions to this volume. But John Alexander takes into consideration one of the most interesting, and still little studied figures on the early-modern stage, the fool/clown, or, in German, Pickelhering, who appeared first ca. 1611–1613. As Yona Pinson now observes, “In the northern Renaissance, the theme of folly occupies a central place in both literary and visual cultures. The idea of folly haunted the late fifteenth-century imagination. This generation’s fears and anxieties were channeled into an obsession with folly that inherited the exclusive position that, until then, had been held by the terrifying, medieval image of death.”²⁸⁴

The jester or fool on the stage, at first identified as Pickelhering, then as Jean Potage (since ca. 1620)—the former drawing on the English model, the latter on the complementary French figure, but both predicated on the stereotypical foreign character one can easily laugh about while watching a theater production²⁸⁵—later only as Hanswurst (in its exclusively German manifestation, which harkened back to the early sixteenth century), proved to be critical in the development of early-modern drama in Germany, and this not only to expose individual shortcomings, vices, and sinful behavior, but also, as Alexander indicates, to explore ways to identify cures for society at large, and for melancholy in particular, a major medico-psychological problem in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.²⁸⁶ The Pickelhering gained ascendancy on the stage because he assumed a variety of roles, providing entertainment and merriment, representing foolish behavior, or the typical con-man; hence he invited laughter which served multiple purposes. One should, however, also not forget that the Pickelhering could assume the important function of organizing the appearance and disappearance of the other

²⁸⁴ Yona Pinson, *The Fools’ Journey*, 1.

²⁸⁵ For the figure of the English clown, see Robert Hornback, *The English Clown Tradition from the Middle Ages to Shakespeare*. Studies in Renaissance Literature, 26 (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2009).

²⁸⁶ See, for example, Bridget Gellert Lyons, *Voices of Melancholy: Studies in Literary Treatment of Melancholy in Renaissance England* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1971); Lynn Enterline, *The Tears of Narcissus: Melancholia and Masculinity in Early Modern Writing* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995); Marion A. Wells, *The Secret Wound: Love-Melancholy and Early Modern Romance*. *Figurae: Variation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007).

actors coming onto and leaving the stage. The early-modern German dramatists assigned him a number of different names, but he continued playing the same roles in most of the sixteenth through eighteenth-centuries plays. While the Pickelhering was originally an invention by the English theater troupes who toured Germany until the early seventeenth century, he was also modeled in many ways after the famous *Till Eulenspiegel*, a fascinating and very sophisticated fool and jester cleverly portrayed in the collection of tales that first appeared in 1510 in Low German.

Alexander provides a wealth of examples with Pickelhering appearing on stage in early-modern German play literature, and examines his typical operation and performative roles through which he successfully transgressed all social and gender roles and class distinctions, though without ever concealing his true nature, that of the fool who pokes fun at people because he wants to expose their arrogance, pompousness, greed, and ignorance. Not surprisingly, Pickelhering used satire and parody on a regular basis to ridicule new fashions or value systems, which were normally borrowed from France, and to undermine people's pride and social aspirations in the world of the late Renaissance and the early Baroque.

To what extent this fool figure was entitled to present bawdy imageries and to tell sexually explicit jokes in public remained a topic of much debate even among the major writers at that time. On the other hand, there was pretty much common agreement that this fool figure was fully entitled, if not expected, to poke fun at ignorant peasants and stupid townspeople, probably a staple approach in most forms of laughter and general humor, even today.²⁸⁷ Laughter, however, also erupted, or was evoked, as Alexander shows, by means of facetious terms borrowed from French, Latin, or Italian, or through the deliberate distortion of German words and expressions. As to be expected, this theatrical humor was hence directed, in general, against everyone guilty of lacking education and a modicum of intelligence. At the same time, the Pickelhering figure also targeted shortcomings at court and among the courtiers, which continued, however, a very

²⁸⁷ This finds extraordinary confirmation in the sarcastic, ironic, parodic, sometimes also burlesque and grotesque poetry by the early thirteenth-century Middle High German poet Neidhart; see Ulrich Gaier, *Satire: Studien zu Neidhart, Wittenwiler, Brant und zur satirischen Schreibart* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1967); cf. the parallel phenomenon in the poetic works of Oswald von Wolkenstein (1376/77–1445), Lambertus Okken and Hans-Dieter Mück, *Die satirischen Lieder Oswalds von Wolkenstein wider die Bauern: Untersuchungen zum Wortschatz und zur literarhistorischen Einordnung*. Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik, 316 (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1981). For sixteenth-century satire, see Barbara Könnker, *Satire im 16. Jahrhundert*. By the same token, women have always been the object of male ridicule; see Felicity Nussbaum, *The Brink of All We Hate: English Satires on Women, 1660–1750* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1984); Emily Butterworth, *Poisoned Words: Slander and Satire in Early Modern France*. Research Monographs in French Studies, 21 (Leeds: Legenda, 2006).

long tradition that extended even to the early Middle Ages, though that was not always, if ever, predicated on humor and laughter.²⁸⁸ At times the various Pickelhering figures challenge taxation policies, corruption, lack of morality, and hyperbolic and empty language, claiming global license to voice this kind of criticism through the mask of the fool and by means of making the audience laugh.

Little wonder then, as Alexander concludes, that the figure of the Pickelhering has continued to appeal to his audience throughout the centuries, what- or whoever the target of his foolishness, laughter, satire, or parody might have been. This study then makes clear how much the theater stage had become one of the most important forums to utilize laughter for social, political, economic, religious, moral, and ethical issues relevant for society at large.

Although we may find it puzzling at first, we discover forms of laughter even in the most esoteric and philosophical contexts, and may find ourselves rather challenged in coming to terms with the phenomenon. This happens intriguingly in Johann Valentin Andreae's *Chymische Hochzeit Christiani Rosencreutz* of 1616, which describes a strange wedding attended by Christian Rosencreutz—a self-described member of the brotherhood of the Red Rose Cross and, as Thomas Willard notes, its presumptive founder. Before the promised wedding, he and the other invited guests are put to a series of extraordinary tests. During the process he is repeatedly confronted by laughter that he regards as a sign of contempt or ridicule and that serves to heighten his sense of unworthiness. Nevertheless, while the other guests fail and are ultimately excluded, Rosencreutz passes all the tests. At the end he can even join the group of laughing people in the wedding party because his extraordinary humility has allowed him to gain new knowledge of himself and of the human condition.

Out of the communal laughter arises epistemological enlightenment, which justifies Andreae's use of the term *ludibrium* to identify his text as Menippean satire. As the book's title indicates, a chemical wedding takes place—a new union of matter and spirit or of earthly and heavenly elements as well as of a new king and queen. During the process, however, Rosencreutz has to handle the satirical perception of those court officials who observe his individual steps (and missteps). Meanwhile, harsher laughter erupts over the failures of those who are then punished and thrown out.

Most importantly, however, laughter reveals humans' inability to achieve the level of knowledge reserved for God. Hence the members of the wedding party,

²⁸⁸ C. Stephen Jaeger, *The Origins of Courtliness: Civilizing Trends and the Formation of Courtly Ideals, 939–1210*. The Middle Ages (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), 54–66; Albrecht Classen, "Oswald von Wolkenstein – a Fifteenth-Century Reader of Medieval Courtly Criticism," *Mediaevistik* 3 (1990): 27–53.

including Rosencreutz, finally laugh because they realize the vast gulf that separates man from God and because they accept the vanity of people's attempt to bridge the infinite abyss. The satirical element that permeates the *Chymische Hochzeit* clearly demarcates the boundaries between those who idly try to achieve wisdom and insight through formal pomp and power and those who strive hard, pursue true ideals, and demonstrate clear awareness of their humble origins. Hence, as Willard underscores, satire and irony pervade the entire text and serve as important catalytic instruments to discriminate among people and to pave the way for those who will be chosen to enter directly the community of wise and worthy people.

In this context, at least, laughter can be regarded as complementary to the alchemistic procedure to separate and join opposite, perhaps even contradictory, elements according to a secret plan. The Menippean satire, which finds sophisticated expression in numerous episodes of laughter, characterizes the ideals of the Andreae in the manner used by Erasmus and other imitators of the ancient Greek satirist Menippus. Hereby the wisdom of this world is transcended, and new understanding emerges of the truth of the spiritual world. Laughter unmasks the vanity of materialism and points the way toward what Willard calls "alchemical recreation and spiritual union," allegorically taking the individual through a virtual death experience toward the new life. When Rosencreutz has learned to laugh happily at the folly of his fellow men, he is ready to return to his humble hermitage and resume his life of Christian piety.

How could it have been possible that a theater play performed during the reign of the mighty, absolutist French King Louis XIV (ruled 1643–1715), presenting most sordid and criminal matters on the stage, enjoyed enormous popularity for a long time, inviting the audience to laugh about highly frightful and dangerous topics when the same things actually happened on the streets outside of the theater or somewhere in the city? Diane Rudall introduces us to the world of seventeenth-century theater where shockingly transgressive scenes were enacted with fortune-tellers, sorceresses, and assassins, all figures who actually seem to have operated in the real world and some of whom had then become subjects of criminal prosecutions because of their ghastly deeds that occasionally led to assassination attempts and even killing.

After all, the play, *La Devineresse, ou les Faux Enchantements* (The Fortune-teller, or the False Enchantments), written by Thomas Corneille and Jean Donneau de Visé, which ran uninterrupted for four months in the winter of 1679 to 1680 and which was later revived repeatedly, was based on concrete events involving dubious and shady figures and their aristocratic customers. Once their dealings had been revealed, members of the aristocratic society up to the highest levels were both incriminated and deeply shocked about the alleged events and exposed

dramatic fissures in the seemingly well-structured and centralized absolutist society.

The official explanation for the popularity of the play consisted of a reference to its generic framework, being performed as a comedy. Rudall, however, underscores the truly dark side of the play and its bizarre, tragic, and certainly criminal elements threatening the very heart of French absolutist monarchy. Ironically, the characters in the play seek counsel of a fortune-teller regarding love, money, and courage (or fame), values that can be defined as being precisely the same which determined the audience at large. In other words, Corneille and Donneau de Visé presented the viewer with an intricate, yet not too esoteric mirror image of themselves and their courtly world.

Amazingly, while the criminal investigations and torture of the real fortune-teller took place within the prison, the performance on the theater stage continued, creating an odd split reality in Paris, establishing an atmosphere in which neither the prison nor the stage seemed all that real or all that fictional. It is precisely these elements of ambivalence and artificiality which invited the audience to laugh and to throng to the theater to see this play, perhaps because its performance was almost too uncannily predicated on the criminal reality on the streets and yet cast them in the framework of a fanciful, fictional account.

Rudall identifies this phenomenon as "illusion-allusion," a gliding and unsteady interplay between perceived reality and played out imagination without any clear demarcation lines. One example of many might be the appearance of a woman with a bloated belly who visits the sorceress, and leaves with a flat belly, obviously causing the audience to think about what happens when a woman has an abortion. Other women, both outside the theater and inside, try to resort to poison acquired from the fortune-teller to get rid of a hated person. By referring to these episodes, the play thus pushed the audience to the extreme in accepting the events described only as imagination, while the numerous rumors and even reports on the street addressed and perceived the very same accounts as most real.

The specific laughter that must have erupted during and about the play, considering its long-lasting popularity despite the grotesque and horror-driven elements, finds its best explanation, according to Rudall, in the incredible proximity of fact and fiction, with a distinct line of separation barely noticeable, though this very line made the theatrical performance possible in the first place without being banned by the king. The audience's laughter indicated a growing awareness that reality was too gruesome to believe, although the performance on the stage did not provide a fully satisfying substitution. The merriment, then, developed out of the realization of the subtle yet most important discrepancy between both dimensions, though neither ones could really exist without the other. The criminal acts certainly created fear and horror, which then found release in the enjoyment of the play with the subsequent laughter. But the play itself

induced anxiety and insecurity as well, which then could be compensated through the realization that it was all only fiction, whereas in the real world the specially convened court was supposedly dealing with the problems in a more or less efficient manner. Hence the implied laughter, undoubtedly an expression of feelings of insecurity and reflecting doubts about personal positions in society and/or at the court, pointed to the fact that even fiction, that is, theatrical performance, could directly refer back to reality and expose dreadful secrets, undermining all kinds of authorities and power structures.²⁸⁹ This kind of laughter seems to share many similarities with the laughter evoked by the hilarious, but often aggressive and hostile, jests and facetious ridicules carried out by the German Till Eulenspiegel figure (see my comments above) or the notorious Pickelhering (see the contribution by John Alexander), and everywhere we observe a growing sense of the world being characterized by duplicity, hypocrisy, and deceit.²⁹⁰

Our volume concludes with a critical examination of this very aspect which increasingly reached the surface during the so-called long eighteenth century, as intriguingly revealed by ever growing strategies of ridiculing, satirizing, and laughing at individuals, social groups, teachings, value systems, and institutions. Allison P. Coudert traces the expanding unease about the precarious relationship between the individual self and the political, material, and cultural conditions since the time of Cervantes's *Don Quixote* (1605 and 1615), a profound discrepancy between appearance and fact. To be more precise, the early modern age witnessed a growing awareness of the disturbingly illusionary character of social conditions, an awareness that seems to have reached its full extent with the rise of early modern sciences and its globally destructive impact on traditional belief systems and the overarching religious ideology. As Harold Bloom insightfully observes regarding Cervantes's sad knightly figure: "He is at war with Freud's reality principle, which accepts the necessity of dying. But he is neither a fool nor a madman, and his vision always is at least double: he sees what we see, yet he sees something else also, a possible glory that he desires to appropriate or at least share."²⁹¹

²⁸⁹ Mary Douglas, "Jokes," *Implicit Meanings: Selected Essays in Anthropology*. 2nd edition (1966; London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 146–64.

²⁹⁰ Albrecht Classen, "Transgression and Laughter, the Scatological and the Epistemological"; id., "Laughter as the Ultimate Epistemological Vehicle in the Hands of Till Eulenspiegel."

²⁹¹ Harold Bloom, "Introduction: Don Quixote, Sancho Panza, and Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra," xxiii. He adds, "Unlike Orlando's or Amadís's, Don Quixote's madness is deliberate, self-inflicted, a traditional poetic strategy. . . . A fiction, believed in even though know it is a fiction, can be validated only by sheer will" (xxvii).

In the wake of the religious wars in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (particularly in Germany and France), religion assumed, on the one hand, a new importance and intensity (see the foundation in 1540 and rapid establishment of the Jesuit Order, and also the Puritan Revolution or English Civil War between 1641 and 1651), and yet was, on the other, increasingly perceived as a matter deeply characterized by hypocrisy, hence an ideal object for satirists and caricaturists. The rise of modern sciences and the far-reaching paradigm shift from the geocentric to the heliocentric world view lent additional weight to this phenomenon. As we know only too well, people in the early modern age were bombarded with ever new knowledge of all kinds and faced serious challenges to their own self-concept in light of a barrage of shocking facts about the New World and the physical, mathematical conditions of their own material existence. One natural reaction was to respond rather negatively to the generally perceived duplicity and ambivalence of all traditional institutions and power structures, and then to laugh about them in a new sense of unexpected superiority over them. Subsequently both scientists and artists began to explore the destabilized correlation between fact and fiction and quickly realized the degree to which their existence was built on a global game of masquerading and relativism. This in turn invited the public to laugh and to ridicule those who held on to pomp and pretentiousness based on their traditional ranks and public roles, ripping away their external pretentiousness and presumed authority.²⁹²

Increasingly caricaturists and writers explored the potentials of this new understanding and developed a growing number of satirical works which exposed the pretentious nature of all human knowledge and traditional customs. Hogarth, Swift, Colman, Sterne, and many others are cited by Coudert as witnesses for her claim that the long eighteenth century was intriguingly determined by this new perception of reality as being nothing than a screen, or a mask, like Cervantes had heralded it in his figure of Don Quijote. This disturbing awareness also pertained to the rather dubious quest for self-knowledge and identity, both of which suddenly felt the highly deconstructive impact of radical relativism, as expressed by pervasive laughter everywhere, perhaps best represented by Beaumarchais's *The Marriage of Figaro* (1784). Moreover, the heavy use of masks in public entertainment, literature, and the arts also threatened traditional class differences and opened the floodgate for much new political thought, which ultimately also

²⁹² Leon A Harris, *The Fine Art of Political Wit: Being a Lively Guide to the Artistic Invective, Elegant Epithet, and Polished Impromptus as well as the Gallant and Graceful Worldly Wit of Various British & American Politicians from the 18th Century Through Our Own Days of Grace: a Handbook for Piercing the Political Epidermis of Opponents* (New York: Dutton, 1964); Andrea Matallana, *Humor y política: un estudio comparativo de tres publicaciones de humor político*. Libros del Rojas (Buenos Aires: Secretaría de Extensión Universitaria y Bienestar Estudiantil, Universidad de Buenos Aires: EUDEBA, 1991)

contributed to the rise of revolutionary movements since the barriers to the old power structures had been considerably lowered. But first came, as Coudert forcefully suggests, much public laughter which made brittle what used to be metaphorically written in stone, such as the Church, the monarchy, and feudalism because of the fundamentally transgressive nature of the comic.²⁹³ We might even be able to go so far as to attribute the rise of general laughter to the unstoppable growth of cities and hence of urbanity all over the European landscape, where the new book and art markets provided the best forums to satirize and ridicule ancient and highly esteemed institutions, authorities, and idols.²⁹⁴

The German poet Friedrich Hagedorn (1708–1754) from Hamburg, who was deeply influenced by Shaftesbury's philosophy, injected, for example, a significant element of laughter and humor into Enlightenment literature and created numerous highly entertaining sonnets and other poems.²⁹⁵ Essentially, Hagedorn promoted a form of satire predicated on the priority of reason in every type of human actions and performances, even in the area of religious practice and convictions. As Reinhold Münster emphasizes, Hagedorn viewed humans as frail and underdeveloped, which hence implied that either the moralist or the satirist was called upon to help compensate the many shortcomings among people. More specifically, satire emerged as an effective instrument in the poet's hands to chastize and reprimand foolish and stubborn administrators and bureaucrats, small-minded writers and imbecile politicians, ignorant alchemists and medical practitioners, allowing thereby reason to regain the upper hand in public discourse, in science, the arts, and even in the religious sphere.²⁹⁶ The influence of

²⁹³ Laughter can always have tremendous political implications, as the countless number of political jokes, particularly in suppressive systems, indicates. See for instance, selected at random, the contributions to *Look Who's Laughing: Gender and Comedy*, ed. Gail Finney. Studies in Humor and Gender, 1 (Langhorne, PA: Gordon & Breach, 1994); and to *The Power of Laughter: Comedy and Contemporary Irish Theatre*, ed. Eric Weitz (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2004); see also Hans Speier, *Witz und Politik: Essays über die Macht und das Lachen* (Zürich: Edition Interfrom, 1975); Ronald Scott Jenkins, *Subversive Laughter: the Liberating Power of Comedy* (New York: Free Press; Toronto: Maxwell Macmillan Canada; New York: Maxwell Macmillan International, 1994); Patrice Gaines, *Laughing in the Dark: From Colored Girl to Woman of Color—a Journey from Prison to Power* (New York: Anchor Books, 1995); Helga Kotthoff, *Das Gelächter der Geschlechter: Humor und Macht in Gesprächen von Frauen und Männern*. 2nd rev. ed. (1988; [Constance]: UVK, Universitätsverlag Konstanz, 1995).

²⁹⁴ See the contributions to *Urban Space in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Times*, ed. Albrecht Classen. Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture, 4 (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2009).

²⁹⁵ Reinhold Münster, *Friedrich von Hagedorn: Dichter und Philosoph der fröhlichen Aufklärung* (Munich: iudicium, 1997), 41–43; Ulrike Bardt, *Literarische Wahlverwandschaften und poetische Metamorphosen: Die Fabel- und Erzähldichtung Friedrich von Hagedorns* (Stuttgart and Weimar: J. B. Metzler, 1999), 129–36. She emphasizes: "Hagedorn verwandelt alles Lehrhafte ins Ästhetische, so daß sich die scharfsinnige Einbildungskraft selbst in dieser Auflösung genießt" (Hagedorn transforms all didactics into aesthetics so that the sharp power of imagination enjoys itself in this dissolution).

²⁹⁶ Münster, *Friedrich von Hagedorn*, 119–25

Shaftesbury's idea on the German Anacreontic poet Hagedorn cannot be overlooked who argued that humor and laughter would serve as the best basis for the establishment of justice and general harmony in society.²⁹⁷

Not surprisingly, some of the most sacrosanct ideals and values were suddenly regarded in new light and thus lost in their previously sacrosanct authority, making them rather shockingly to objects of much humor, for instance the inquiry pertaining to the human soul, its identity, and location. Coudert emphasizes, however, that all this laughter also threatened the basic philosophical concepts that used to constitute the basic glue holding together all society. By analyzing the powerful emergence of wide-spread comic she surprisingly unearths a radically new perspective that might explain better than before the reasons for the sudden collapse of absolutist society and the development of revolutions determining the end of the eighteenth century. The authorities, whether the Church or natural sciences, the political structure or the schools, all became objects of public laughter and thus lost distinctly in status and respect, without anything else substituting for this growing sense of a void.²⁹⁸

Most insightfully, Coudert concludes with what she started out with, highlighting how much the figure of Don Quijote truly represents the rise of modernity with its loss of identity because the mask became absolutized and hence was quickly recognized as what it was: nothing but a mask.²⁹⁹ Focusing on public humor, then, allows Coudert to recognize laughter as the critical tool with which artists, writers, and comedians pried open the traditional world they lived in and to expose its triviality and relativism to everyone to see.

²⁹⁷ Münster, *Friedrich von Hagedorn*, 247–49.

²⁹⁸ Könniker, *Satire im 16. Jahrhundert*; Jörg Schöner, *Roman und Satire im 18. Jahrhundert: Ein Beitrag zur Poetik*. Germanistische Abhandlungen, 27 (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1969); Vic Gatrell, *City of Laughter: Sex and Satire in Eighteenth-Century London* (London: Atlantic Books, 2007); Amelia F. Rauser, *Caricature Unmasked: Irony, Authenticity, and Individualism in Eighteenth-Century English Prints*. The University of Delaware Press Studies in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Art and Culture (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2008); *Swift's Travels: Eighteenth-Century British Satire and its Legacy*, ed. Nicholas Hudson and Aaron Santesso (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

²⁹⁹ See the contributions to *The Rusted Hauberk: Feudal Ideals of Order and Their Decline*, ed. Liam O. Purdon and Cindy L. Vitto (Gainesville, Tallahassee, et al.: University Press of Florida, 1994). I have observed similar manifestation of this phenomenon in thirteenth-century German literature, serving as a kind of avatar, where the traditional ideals of courtly love become suspect and ultimately fall apart, "Moriz, Tristan, and Ulrich as Master Disguise Artists: Deconstruction and Reenactment of Courtliness in Moriz von Craün, Tristan als Mönch, and Ulrich von Liechtenstein's *Frauendienst*," *Journal of English and German Philology* 103.4 (2004): 475–504. Another great predecessor for these early modern literary documents reflecting the extent to which the world had fallen victim to duplicity, deception, and masquerading was Heinrich Wittenwiler's *Der Ring*, ed., trans., and commentary by Bernhard Sowinski. *Helfant Texte*, T 9 (Stuttgart: helfant edition, 1988); see also Ulrich Gaier, *Satire: Studien zu Neidhart, Wittenwiler, Brant und zur satirischen Schreibart* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1967).

Again, as we have observed already many times, laughter served as a fundamental epistemological instrument, especially in its function of unmasking the deceptive strategies employed by the authorities and traditional power structures already for far too long. Enlightenment philosophers on the continent, such as Christian Wolf and Johann Christian Gottsched, recognized the power of witticism and jokes as a new mode of expression for the intellectual mind which can easily recognize the parallels between objects or people and hence also their hilarious discrepancies and hypocrisy. The true poet was therefore called upon to provide laughter for his audience, both in a didactic and in a philosophical fashion.³⁰⁰ Altogether, we might say, laughter provides the essential prism into the various facets of human nature, rationality, and mentality. As a consequence, we may say, the study of laughter proves to be the gateway for the history of psychology, philosophy, anthropology, sociology, and political sciences in the Middle Ages and the early modern period, to mention just the most important aspects.

Finally, it is my pleasure to express my gratitude to The University of Arizona, particularly to the University Library, Special Collections, for the generous support that made possible the organization of the "7th International Symposium on Medieval and Early Modern Culture," with the special topic of "Laughter in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Age: Epistemological Investigations from an Interdisciplinary Perspective," April 30–May 3, 2009. I would also like to express my gratitude to UAMARRC (University of Arizona Medieval, Renaissance, and Reformation Committee), GEMS (Group for Early Modern Studies at the University of Arizona), and ACMRS (Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, Arizona State University, Tempe) for financial contributions, and also the Departments of German Studies, Spanish and Portuguese, and Anthropology.

Last but by far not the least, I would like to extend my thanks to all colleagues who submitted their studies for this volume. They were patient and highly cooperative in the long process of getting all the material into publishable form, demonstrating true scholarly spirit in their willingness to revise, to reflect anew, and to respond to comments and new findings reflecting the extensive peer reviewing process. The oral exchanges during the symposium were only the first

³⁰⁰ Bardt, *Literarische Wahlverwandschaft*, 129–32; Rainer Stollmann, *Groteske Aufklärung: Studien zu Natur und Kultur des Lachens* (Stuttgart: M & P, 1997); Anne Richardot, *Le Rire des lumières. Les Dix-Huitièmes siècles*, 61 (Paris: Champion, 2002).

stage leading to the present volume. During the intensive editing stage I distributed the individual papers among all contributors, some of whom had not participated in the May 2009 meeting and joined our project only later. This led to a true scholarly exchange of a very high constructive caliber from which everyone profited extensively. During the Summer of 2009 I had the wonderful opportunity to serve as guest professor at the Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg, Germany, which provided me also with the time and resources to lay the foundation for this Introduction. I am very thankful for this invitation and the chance at one time to present the theoretical framework to a highly interested audience there. I owe gratitude to Janna Orlova Schaefer for her invaluable help in the ultimate stages with some editing tasks. Finally, I very much appreciate that this book manuscript was accepted for publication by Walter de Gruyter in Berlin to be part of our book series, "Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture." I am particularly indebted to Dr. Heiko Hartmann, former editor-in-chief, for his by now long-term collegiality, nay, friendship, and for his wonderful collaboration.

As the German proverb goes, "Lachen ist die beste Medizin" (laughter is the best medicine)! But we have also realized how much power laughter can exert, both in the positive and in the negative sense. Our lives would be rather drab and unimaginative, if it were devoid of satire, irony, sarcasm, parody, and the like. Human wit and intelligence find a most fertile ground in laughter, and it might be high time for us today to pay closer attention to the lessons from the past. Neither terrorism nor open warfare, neither witch craze nor mob activities are the right answers to life's questions, concerns, needs, desires, and dreams—by far not! People have always different opinions, beliefs, and ideologies, but the principles of all human existence should be tolerance, mutual respect, and freedom. Laughter, as much as it might hurt some groups or people at times, has always had a great value in making possible the understanding that no one and nothing can be that serious or that important that we could not laugh about a person, an object, a situation, or an idea.

Those who fight laughter or look sternly down upon it reveal only the full extent of their own insecurity, lack of individual development, and fear of losing what they regard as their ultimate identity, culture, religion, or ideology. By contrast, we deserve to be called human above and all for the simple reason that we can laugh and grant others the fundamental right to laugh about us and/or with us, about themselves, and their world. Whatever faith one might have, I can only imagine God as laughing about us human creatures in our silly, mundane, and so endlessly foolish endeavors. We are, after all, as Sebastian Brant coined it so beautifully in 1494, all passengers in the global 'Ship of Fools.'

I would like to dedicate this volume to the most cherished companion in my life, my wife Carolyn. Much of our mutual joy and delights in our long and wonderful marriage has resulted from a good laugh or a broad grin about people, situations, or conditions, ultimately about ourselves because we strive so hard and fail so easily as human beings.

Tucson, AZ, Feb. 2010

Chapter 1

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Laughter in Procopius's *Wars*

1. Introduction

Emotions and their expressions in nonverbal communication have increasingly been recognized as a topic of historical research in recent years.¹ In Classical Studies, laughter has been a subject of profound interest; there are monographs about this phenomenon, but primarily collective volumes have been published, which are sometimes set in a more extended time frame and respectively contain essays from various disciplines. Especially the laughter in Homer, in Greek comedy, in Graeco-Roman philosophy and rhetoric as well as in Roman satire has been discussed.²

¹ For examples see: Simo Knuuttila, *Emotions in Ancient and Medieval Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004); Barbara H. Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY, and London: Cornell University Press, 2006), with a bibliography, 208–20; *Emotionalität in der Antike zwischen Diskursivität und Performativität*, ed. Diana Bormann and Frank Wittchow (Berlin: Eca, 2008).

² Stephen Halliwell, *Greek Laughter: A Study of Cultural Psychology from Homer to Early Christianity* (Cambridge, New York, et al.: Cambridge University Press, 2008); *Laughter Down the Centuries*, vol. 1, ed. Siegfried Jäkel and Asko Timonen. *Annales Universitatis Turkuensis*, Ser. B, 208 (Turku: Turun Yliopisto, 1994); *Laughter Down the Centuries*, vol. 2, ed. Siegfried Jäkel and Asko Timonen. *Annales Universitatis Turkuensis*, Ser. B, 213 (Turku: Turun Yliopisto, 1995); *Laughter Down the Centuries*, vol. 3, ed. Siegfried Jäkel, Asko Timonen, and Veli-Matti Rissanen. *Annales Universitatis Turkuensis*, Ser. B, 221 (Turku: Turun Yliopisto, 1997); *Le Rire des Anciens: Actes du colloque international–Université de Rouen, École normale supérieure, 11–13 janvier 1995*, ed. Monique Trédé and Philippe Hoffmann. *Études de littérature ancienne*, 8 (Paris: Presses de l'École Normale Supérieure, 1998); *Le Rire des Grecs: Anthropologie du rire en Grèce ancienne*, ed. Marie-Laurance Desclos (Grenoble: Millon, 2000).

Similarly, crying, the counterpart of laughter, has recently been treated by quite a few ancient historians and classicists.³ It is, however, conspicuous that both laughter and crying in ancient historiography have only rarely been the object of scrutiny.⁴ As a matter of fact, this is particularly astonishing as some ancient sources portray the laughter (or crying) of people relatively often. This also applies to the late-antique writer Procopius, whose work *Bella* about Justinian's wars serves as basis for the following considerations.

A native of Caesarea in Palestine, he was born around the year 500 and became *assessor* or *consiliarius* (legal adviser) of the Byzantine general Belisarius in 527, whom he accompanied until 540 or even 542 because of which he was later able to report as an eye-witness on this period. In Constantinople he published the first seven books of the *Bella* probably around 551, followed two years later by another one; he died shortly after 560. His historical work is written according to classical norms so that he can be seen as the most important historian of late antiquity.⁵

³ Some examples for recent works are: *Zeitschrift für Semiotik* 28: Tränen und Weinen in der griechisch-römischen Antike (Tübingen: Stauffenburg, 2006), with an essential selected bibliography 167-75; *Tears in the Graeco-Roman World*, ed. Thorsten Fögen (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2009). Hedwig Kenner deals with both laughter and crying, *Weinen und Lachen in der griechischen Kunst*. Sitzungsberichte der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften. Philosophisch-historische Klasse. 234, 2 (Vienna: Rohrer, 1960); Dominique Arnould, *Le Rire et les larmes dans la littérature grecque d'Homère à Platon*. Collection d'Études anciennes, 119 (Paris: Belles Lettres, 1990).

⁴ One of the few exceptions is Catherine Darbo-Peschanski's essay, "Rire et rationalité: le cas de l'historiographie grecque," in *Le Rire des Grecs: Anthropologie du rire en Grèce ancienne*, ed. Marie-Laurance Desclos (Grenoble: Millon, 2000), 203-13.

⁵ The Greek citations from the *Persian Wars* (=BP), *Vandal Wars* (=BV), and *Gothic Wars* (=BG) are taken from Procopii Caesariensis opera omnia. vol. 1: *De bellis libri I-IV*, ed. Jacob Haury. 2nd ed. (1905; Leipzig: Teubner, 1962); and Procopii Caesariensis opera omnia. vol. 2: *De bellis libri V-VIII* ed. Jacob Haury. 2nd ed. (1905; Leipzig: Teubner, 1963). For Procopius's life and work, cf. John R. Martindale, *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*. vol. III. (Cambridge, New York, et al.: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 1060-66 s. v. "Procopius 2"; Averil Cameron, *Procopius and the Sixth Century* (London: Duckworth, 1985); James A. S. Evans. *Procopius*. Twayne's World Authors Series, 170 (New York: Twayne, 1972); and Anthony Kaldellis, *Procopius of Caesarea: Tyranny, History, and Philosophy at the End of Antiquity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004). Furthermore, it is still worthwhile to read Otto Voh's three short articles, *Zur Geschichtsschreibung und Weltauffassung des Prokop von Caesarea I-III*. Wissenschaftliche Beilage zum Jahresbericht des Gymnasiums Christian-Ernestinum Bayreuth (Oberviechtach: Forstner, 1951-1953).

The following essay presents an exhaustive compilation of all the examples for laughter in the *Wars*. They shall be discussed with respect to the context of the work and subsequently their function shall be analyzed. In the process of doing so, it is not the issue of authenticity that is important (although this subject may well be raised when dealing with Procopius); laughter should rather be understood as a literary topos which helps to outline certain tendencies of presentation more succinctly. As I intend to show in this paper, a critical differentiation between the examples for the Romans' laughter⁶ on the one hand and that of their enemies on the other hand is appropriate and a meaningful hermeneutic approach.

2. The Romans' Laughter

In the *Bella*, Procopius describes the laughter of a Roman general in several instances. It is not surprising that, with one exception, the general is always Belisarius, the protagonist of the *Wars*.

Mocking Laughter and Calm Laughter

The first instance can be found at the end of the second book of the *Persian Wars*: The peace treaty of 532 between the Romans and the Persians was already broken in 540 by Chosroes I.⁷ After Belisarius has set up camp with his army next to Dura-Europos,⁸ the Persian king decides to send his writer Abandanes there. His alleged task is to raise the complaint why the Emperor Justinian has not yet sent an envoy for the prospective peace negotiations⁹; his

⁶ As the Byzantines considered themselves to be Romans, the term "Romans" can be used as a synonym for the expression "Byzantines" during Justinian's period—in terms of ideology they are "Romans," geographically seen they are "Byzantines."

⁷ After agreeing on the so-called Endless Peace between Romans and Persians in spring of 532, there were several quiet years on the eastern war front until Chosroes acted contrary to these agreements and invaded Syria, cf. Martindale, *Prosopography*, 304 s. v. "Chosroes I Anoushirvan."

⁸ BP 2.21.1; cf. Martindale, *Prosopography*, 210 s. v. "Fl. Belisarius 1."

⁹ Diplomatic negotiations between Chosroes and Roman negotiators had already taken place near Antioch; there had been an agreement, inter alia, that Justinian would send envoys to the Persian king in order to finalize a written peace treaty, cf. BP 2.10.24. Subsequently, the Byzantine Emperor had guaranteed the fulfilment of these conditions in a letter, as mentioned in BP 2.13.1.

true mission, though, consists in having a close look at Belisarius (“τὸν στρατηγὸν ὁποῖός ποτε εἶη κατασκέψασθαι”).¹⁰

The Roman general learns in advance about this ambiguous game and stages the scenery of a hunt—on the one hand with the intention of hiding the fact that he commands a smaller number of soldiers than the Persians,¹¹ on the other hand perhaps in order to create ostentatiously a peaceful background for the diplomatic meeting. Taking six thousand soldiers with him, he departs quite a distance from the camp; additionally, however, he orders two high-ranking men to cross the Euphrates with a thousand riders so they might walk back and forth on the other side of the river, ostensibly, in order to prevent the enemies from crossing the river, i.e., from retreating into their own territory.¹² Meanwhile, Belisarius himself and the soldiers around him pretend to be occupied with nothing else but hunting.¹³ According to his assignment,

¹⁰ BP 2.21.1: “Χοσρόης δὲ μαθὼν Βελισάριον παντὶ τῷ Ῥωμαίων στρατῷ ἐστρατοπεδεῦσθαι ἐν Εὐρωπῷ, πρὸσω μὲν ἐλαύνειν οὐκέτι ἔγνω, τῶν δὲ βασιλικῶν γραμματέων ἕνα, Ἀβανδάνην ὄνομα, δόξαν ἐπὶ ξυνέσει πολλὴν ἔχοντα, παρὰ Βελισάριον ἔπεμψε, τὸν στρατηγὸν ὁποῖός ποτε εἶη κατασκέψόμενον, τῷ δὲ λόγῳ μεμψόμενον, ὅτι δὴ βασιλεὺς Ἰουστινιανὸς τοὺς πρέσβεις ἐς Πέρσας ἤκιστα πέμψειεν, ἐφ’ ᾧ τὰ ἀμφὶ τῆς εἰρήνης κατὰ τὰ ξυγκείμενα πρυτανεύσωσιν.”

¹¹ Cf. *Prokop, Perserkriege*, gr.-germ. ed. Otto Veh (Munich: Heimeran, 1970), 498. The numerical superiority of the Persians is stated in BP 2.21.17f.

¹² BP 2.21.1f.: “ὅπερ μαθὼν Βελισάριος ἐποίει τοιάδε. αὐτὸς μὲν ἑξακισχιλίους ἀπολεξάμενος ἄνδρας εὐμήκεις τε καὶ τὰ σώματα καλοὺς μάλιστα μακρὰν πρὸς ἀποθῆν τοῦ στρατοπέδου ὡς κυνηγετήσων ἐστάλη, Διογένην δὲ τὸν δορυφόρον καὶ Ἀδόλιον τὸν Ἀκακίου, ἄνδρα Ἀρμένιον γένος, βασιλεῖ μὲν αἰεὶ ἐν παλατίῳ τὰ ἐς τὴν ἡσυχίαν ὑπηρετοῦντα (σιλεντιαρίους Ῥωμαῖοι καλοῦσιν οἷς ἡ τιμὴ αὕτη ἐπίκειται), τότε δὲ Ἀρμενίων τινῶν ἄρχοντα, τὸν ποταμὸν διαβάντας ξὺν ἱππεῦσι χιλίοις περιμέναι τὴν ἐκείνην ἡμίονα ἐκέλευε, δόκησιν αἰεὶ παρεχομένους τοῖς πολεμίοις ὡς, ἢν ἐθέλωσι τὸν Εὐφράτην διαβάντες ἐπὶ τὰ σφέτερα αὐτῶν ὁδῷ ἵεναι, οὐ μῆποτε ἐπιτρέψουσι. καὶ οἱ μὲν κατὰ ταῦτα ἐποιοῦν.” The purpose of these thousand soldiers on the other side of the river consisted mainly in disconcerting the enemy, as explicitly stated in BP 2.21.18: “τοῖς δὲ ἀμφὶ Διογένην τε καὶ Ἀδόλιον σὺν τοῖς χιλίοις ἐπέστελλε (ὁ Βελισάριος sc.) τὰ πρῶτα περιμέναι τὴν ἐκείνην ἀκτὴν, ὅπως δὴ ἐς ταραχὴν ἀφασίᾳ τινὶ τὸν βάρβαρον καταστήσονται.”

¹³ Procopius provides a detailed description of the Roman hunting party and goes on by clearly emphasizing that the staging of the scenery appears to be perfect at first sight: “Βελισάριος δέ, ἐπεὶ τὸν πρεσβευτὴν ἀγχιστά πη ἐπέπυστο εἶναι, καλύβην ἐκ παχείων τινῶν σινδόνων πηξάμενος, ἣν δὴ παπυλεῶνα καλεῖν νενομίσασιν, ἐπάθητο ἐκεῖ, ὥσπερ ἐν χωρίῳ ἐρήμῳ, παραδηλῶν ὅτι δὴ οὐδεμιᾷ παρασκευῇ ἐνταῦθα ἦκοι. τοὺς δὲ στρατιώτας διέταξεν ὥδε. τῆς μὲν καλύβης ἐφ’ ἐκάτερα Θράκες τε καὶ Ἰλλυριοὶ ἦσαν, Γότθοι δὲ μετ’ αὐτοὺς, καὶ τούτων ἐχόμενοι Ἑρούλοι, μεθ’ οὓς Βανδίλοι τε καὶ Μαυρούσιοι ἦσαν. τοῦ τε πεδίου ἐπὶ πλείστον διηκόν. οὐ γὰρ ἐστῶτες ἐπὶ χώρας αἰεὶ τῆς αὐτῆς ἔμενον, ἀλλὰ διεστηκότες τε ἀπ’ ἀλλήλων καὶ περιπάτους ποιούμενοι παρέργως τε καὶ ὡς ἥκιστα κατεσπουδασμένως ἐς τὸν Χοσρόου πρεσβευτὴν ἔβλεπον. εἶχεν δὲ αὐτῶν οὐδεὶς οὔτε χλαμύδα οὔτε ἄλλην

Abandanes complains that, despite earlier agreements (“καθὰ ξυνέκειτο πρότερον”), the Byzantine envoys have not been sent yet, which is why Chosroes felt compelled to invade Roman territory with military force.¹⁴

Belisarius's reaction differs from what could be expected in such a situation: He is neither afraid of the enemies who are camped out nearby nor upset by the accusation of Chosroes's envoy. Rather, he presents his answer “γελῶντί τε καὶ ἀνειμένῳ τῷ προσώπῳ” (“with a laughing and serene countenance”), its content being completely consistent with his behavior. According to the Roman general, Chosroes acted contrary to human behavior since falling back on military force is only appropriate when diplomacy has failed. The Persian king, however, did exactly the opposite thing: “ὁ δὲ γενόμενος ἐν μέσοις Ῥωμαίοις, εἶτα τοὺς ὑπὲρ τῆς εἰρήνης προτείνεται λόγους” (“Yet he invades Roman territory and then demands negotiations for peace”).¹⁵

This clear breach of the diplomatic code of conduct does not unsettle the Roman general; he expresses his position succinctly, yet unequivocally. As Chosroes was the first not to abide by these unwritten rules, he is not entitled to make such accusations. Even if the situation is tense, Belisar manages to stay calm and to demonstrate his superiority with his laughter and with the unmistakable manner with which he verbally makes his point. Certainly he also wants to convey a healthy portion of mockery because of the Persians' assumption that the Romans may be intimidated by the visit of an envoy. The following course of events proves the commander right about his evaluation of the situation since Chosroes has to cave in at least in this instance.

Belisarius's performance also convinces Abandanes, who fulfils his unofficial mission and informs his king about the commander's outstanding qualities (he

ἐπωμίδα τινὰ, ἀλλὰ χιτώνας μὲν λινοὺς καὶ ἀναξυρίδας ἀμπεχόμενοι, εἶτα διεζωσμένοι ἐβάδιζον. εἶχε δὲ τὴν τοῦ ἵππου μάστιγα ἕκαστος, ὅπλον δὲ τῷ μὲν ξίφος ἦν, τῷ δὲ πέλεκυς, τῷ δὲ τὸξα γυμνά. δόκησιν τε παρείχοντο ἅπαντες ὅτι δὴ ἀφροντιστήσαντες τῶν ἄλλων ἀπάντων κυνηγετήσιν ἠπειγόντο” (BP 2.21.3–8).

¹⁴ BP 2.21.9: “Ὁ μὲν οὖν Ἀβανδάνης Βελισαρίῳ ἐς ὅψιν ἤκων δεινὰ ποιεῖσθαι τὸν βασιλέα Χοσρόην ἔφη, ὅτι δὴ καθὰ ξυνέκειτο πρότερον οὐ πέμψει παρ’ αὐτὸν τοὺς πρέσβεις ὁ Καῖσαρ (οὕτω γὰρ τὸν Ῥωμαίων βασιλέα καλοῦσι Πέρσαι) καὶ ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ ὁ Χοσρόης ἠνάγκαστο ἐς γῆν τὴν Ῥωμαίων ἐν ὅλοις ἤκειν.”

¹⁵ BP 2.21.10–12: “Βελισάριος δὲ οὔτε κατορρωδήσας, ἄτε πη ἀγχιστα ἐστρατοπεδευμένων βαρβάρων τοσούτων τὸ πλῆθος, οὔτε τῷ λόγῳ ἐς ταραχὴν τινα καταστὰς, ἀλλὰ γελῶντί τε καὶ ἀνειμένῳ τῷ προσώπῳ ἀμείβεται “Οὐ ταύτη” λέγων “ἢ τῷ Χοσρόῃ τανῦν εἰργασθαι νενόμισται τοῖς ἀνθρώποις τὰ πράγματα. οἱ μὲν γὰρ ἄλλοι, ἢν τι ἀντιλέγοιτο σφίσι τε καὶ τῶν πέλας τισὶ, πρεσβεύουσι μὲν ἐς αὐτοὺς πρότερον, ἐπειδὴν δὲ τῶν μετρίων μὴ τύχωσιν, οὕτω δὴ πολέμῳ ἐπ’ αὐτοὺς ἱασιν. ὁ δὲ γενόμενος ἐν μέσοις Ῥωμαίοις, εἶτα τοὺς ὑπὲρ τῆς εἰρήνης προτείνεται λόγους.” ὁ μὲν τοσαῦτα εἰπὼν τὸν πρεσβευτὴν ἀπεπέμψατο.”

is “ἀνδρειότατός τε καὶ ξυνετώτατος,” i.e., “endowed with the utmost courage and prudence”) and the loyalty of his soldiers, and therefore advises him to retreat.¹⁶ Chosroes subsequently refrains from further military action and crosses the Euphrates.¹⁷ After that Belisarius also passes across the river with his army and the two parties assure each other of their mutual goodwill.¹⁸ Nevertheless the Persian king does not abide by the agreements and occupies the city of Kallinikos¹⁹; Belisarius in contrast receives the highest praise for his behavior amongst the soldiers.²⁰ It is to his credit to have persuaded Chosroes to retreat by accurately applying mocking laughter, followed by poignant arguments employed as a performative means, and thus demonstrating his own superiority over the enemy.

Prescient Laughter

Procopius’s protagonist also proves to be a clever war strategist during an episode in the *Gothic Wars* which takes place on the eighteenth day of the siege of Rome by the Ostrogoths in spring of 537.²¹ At the start of the day, the Gothic

¹⁶ Cf. BP 2.21.13f. Furthermore, Procopius provides tactical reasons for a retreat.

¹⁷ Cf. BP 2.21.15–22.

¹⁸ Cf. BP 2.21.23–27.

¹⁹ Cf. BP 2.21.30–33.

²⁰ In 2.21.28f. Belisarius’s success is contrasted with the failure of the other Romans and the (alleged) inferiority of the Persians: “ἦν γὰρ ὡς ἀληθῶς λόγου καὶ ἐπαίνου πολλοῦ ἄξιον, πεφοβημένων μὲν κὰν τοῖς ὀχυρώμασι κρυπτομένων Ῥωμαίων ἀπάντων, Χοσρόου δὲ στρατῷ μεγάλῳ ἐν μέσῃ γεγονότος Ῥωμαίων ἀρχῇ, ἄνδρα στρατηγὸν ξὺν ὀλίγοις τισὶ δρόμῳ ὁξεῖ ἐκ Βυζαντίου μεταξὺ ἦκοντα ἀπ’ ἐναντίας τοῦ Περσῶν βασιλέως στρατοπεδεύσασθαι, Χοσρόην δὲ ἐκ τοῦ ἀπροσδοκίτου, ἢ τὴν τύχην ἢ τὴν ἀρετὴν τοῦ ἀνδρὸς δείσαντα ἢ καὶ τισιν ἐξαπατηθέντα σοφίσμασιν, ἐπιπροσθεν μηκέτι χωρῆσαι, ἀλλὰ τῷ μὲν ἔργῳ φυγεῖν, λόγῳ δὲ τῆς εἰρήνης ἐφέεσθαι.” Procopius’s depiction here is fairly biased as we can assume that tactical considerations weighed in on Chosroes’s decision as well as on his enemy’s decision, cf. *Prokop, Perserkriege*, ed. Veh, 498: “In Wirklichkeit spielte bei der Entscheidung des Königs neben Furcht vor der allgemein wütenden Pest maßgeblich die Hoffnung mit, daß Justinian nunmehr zu ernsthaften Friedensverhandlungen bereit sei.” Chosroes’s character in the *Bella* is constantly portrayed as negative, as shown, e.g., by Procopius’s devastating judgement in BP 2.9.8–13. Cf., e.g., Dariusz Brodka, *Die Geschichtsphilosophie in der spätantiken Historiographie: Studien zu Prokopios von Kaisareia, Agathias von Myrina und Theophylaktos Simokattes*. Studien und Texte zur Byzantinistik, 5 (Frankfurt a. M., Berlin, et al.: Lang, 2004), 120–26; Kaldellis, *Procopius*, 118–28.

²¹ For these events cf. Martindale, *Prosopography*, 194 and 198 s. v. “Fl. Belisarius 1’”: In 535 Belisarius was sent to the West as the highest ranking general for the reconquest of Italy. The Goths’ siege of Rome started at the end of February or the beginning of March 537 and

army under king Vittigis moves forward with towers and battering rams towards the city walls close to the Porta Salaria,²² an event which gives the Romans a real scare.²³ In contrast to that, Belisarius appears to be completely dauntless; he even breaks out into laughter (“ἐγέλα”) when he sees the enemies approaching in battle formation and orders his soldiers to stay calm (“ἡσυχάζειν”) likewise—they are not supposed to act prematurely but wait for his sign for battle.

Neither the people around the Roman leader nor Procopius's readers are capable of understanding the meaning of his laughter at this point. Only the following course of events or the continuation of the narration solves the mystery: “ὅτου δὲ ἔνεκα γελῶν, ἐν μὲν τῷ αὐτίκα ἤκιστα ἐδήλου, ὕστερον δὲ ἐγνώσθη” (“For the moment he did not reveal in any way why he laughed, only later it became obvious”).²⁴ For the time being however, the Romans distrust the general and resent him for not showing the slightest inclination of driving back the hostile attack.²⁵

When the Goths are only a short distance away from the city walls, Belisarius fires an arrow at one of the Gothic commanders who dies instantly; this generates a loud and enthusiastic response among the Roman people as it is seen as a good omen. The second arrow is also shot by the prudent Roman and gets the same reaction.²⁶ Only now does the commander order the whole army

continued until mid March 538.

²² Cf. BG 1.22.9: “ταῦτα μὲν ἀμφὶ Σαλαρίαν πύλην ἐγένετο.”

²³ BG 1.22.1: “Γότθοι δὲ ὀκτωκαιδεκάτῃ ἀπὸ τῆς προσεδρείας ἡμέρα, Οὐτιτίγιδος σφίσιν ἡγουμένου, ἀμφὶ ἡλίου ἀνατολὰς ὡς τειχομαχήσοντες ἐπὶ τὸν περιβόλον ἤεσαν, καὶ Ῥωμαίους ἅπαντας προῖοῦσα ἢ των πύργων τε καὶ κριῶν ὄψις παντάπασί τε αἰθήρης οὐσα ἐξέπλησσε.” A description of the war machinery of the two parties is provided in the previous chapter 1.21.

²⁴ BG 1.22.2: “Βελισάριος δὲ βαδίζουσιν ζὺν ταῖς μηχαναῖς ὀρνῶν τὴν τῶν πολεμίων παρατάξιν, ἐγέλα τε καὶ τοὺς στρατιώτας ἡσυχάζειν ἐκέλευε, καὶ τῶν χειρῶν μηδαμῶς ἄρχειν, ἕως αὐτὸς σημήνη. ὅτου δὲ ἔνεκα γελῶν, ἐν μὲν τῷ αὐτίκα ἤκιστα ἐδήλου, ὕστερον δὲ ἐγνώσθη.”

²⁵ BG 1.22.3: “Ῥωμαῖοι μέντοι αὐτὸν εἰρωνεύεσθαι ὑποτοπάσαντες ἐκάκιζόν τε καὶ ἀναιδῇ ἐκάλουν, καὶ ὅτι ἐς τὰ πρόσω ἰόντας οὐκ ἀναστέλλοι τοὺς ἐναντίους, δεινὰ ἐποιοῦντο.”

²⁶ BG 1.22.4–6: “ἐπεὶ δὲ Γότθοι τῆς τάφρου ἐγγυτέρω ἴκοντο, πρῶτος ὁ στρατηγὸς τὸ τόξον ἐντείνας, τῶν τινα τεθωρακισμένων τε καὶ τῆς στρατιᾶς ἡγουμένων εἰς τὸν αὐχένα ἐπιτυχῶν βάλλει. καὶ ὁ μὲν καιρίαν πληγὴν ἔπεσεν ὕπτιος, Ῥωμαίων δὲ ὁ λεὼς ἅπας ἀνέκραγον ἐξαίσιόν τε καὶ ἀκοῆς κρείσσον, ἄριστον οἰωνὸν ζυνενεχθῆναι σφίσιν οἰόμενοι. δις δὲ Βελισαρίου τὸ βέλος ἀφέντος, ταῦτο τοῦτο καὶ αὐθις ζυνέβη, καὶ ἡ τε κραυγὴ μείζων ἀπὸ τοῦ περιβόλου ἤρθη καὶ τοὺς πολεμίους ἡσσησθαι ἤδη Ῥωμαῖοι ᾤοντο.”

to shoot at the enemies—the soldiers next to him (“οἱ ἀμφ’ αὐτὸν ἅπαντες”), however are to aim only at the oxen, which results in the animals falling to the ground. This immediately undermines the Goths’ war strategy as they cannot continue moving the siege towers forward without these robust animals.²⁷

Belisarius’s tactic is superior to that of his enemies, who have started a compact attack against the walls of Rome, and he has such deep confidence in his strategic skills that he can laugh in advance about the barbarians’ foolishness (“εὐήθειαν”). In fact, the Romans only recognize his anticipatory defensive actions when the enemies have abruptly been rendered incapable of action.²⁸ Belisarius tauntingly laughs at them as he immediately realizes the naiveté of their actions; that way he visibly manifests his superiority even before the battle.²⁹

Mocking Laughter

The experienced and clever commander is not intimidated by his adversaries, and this he proves anew only a few chapters later. After Gothic envoys have negotiated conditions for a truce (“τὰ ἀμφὶ τῇ ἐκεχειρίᾳ”) with Belisarius in Rome,³⁰ as agreed, there is an exchange of hostages and envoys are sent to Justinian shortly before winter solstice in 537³¹; the attacks were to cease for three months until the envoys would have returned from Byzantium.³²

²⁷ BG 1.22.7f.: “καὶ τότε μὲν Βελισάριος τῇ μὲν στρατιᾷ πάσῃ κινεῖν τὰ τοξεύματα πάντα ἐσήμαινε, τοὺς δ’ ἀμφ’ αὐτὸν ἅπαντας ἐς μόνους τοὺς βόας ἐκέλευε βάλλειν. πάντων τε τῶν βοῶν αὐτίκα πεσόντων, οὔτε τοὺς πύργους περαιτέρω κινεῖν οἱ πολέμιοι εἶχον οὔτε τι ἐπιτεχνήσασθαι ἀπορούμενοι ἐν αὐτῷ τῷ ἔργῳ οἴοι τε ἦσαν.”

²⁸ BG 1.22.9: “οὕτω δὲ Βελισαρίου τε ἡ πρόνοια ἐγνόσθη τοῦ μὴ ἐκαστάτω ὄντας τοὺς πολεμίους ἀναπέλλειν περὶ ἄσθαι, καὶ ὅτι γελῶν τὴν τῶν βαρβάρων εὐήθειαν, οἱ δὲ βόας περιάξειν ἐς τῶν ἐναντίων τὸ τεῖχος οὕτως ἀνεπισκέπτως ἐλπίδα εἶχον.” Veh emphasizes the contrast between the frightened Romans and the prudent Belisarius who opens the rain of arrows on the enemies himself at just the right moment, cf. *Prokop, Gotenkriege*, gr.-germ. ed. Otto Veh (Munich: Heimeran, 1966), 1030.

²⁹ Certainly Belisarius’s success is not yet final—Vittigis leaves a part of the Gothic army in front of the Porta Salaria in order to shoot continuously arrows at the battlements so that the Roman general may not withdraw his soldiers from there and deploy them elsewhere, cf. BG 1.22.10.

³⁰ BG 2.6.36.

³¹ BG 2.7.12: “ἤδη γὰρ καὶ τοῦ ἔτους ἀμφὶ τροπὰς χειμερινὰς ἦν.” Cf. Martindale, *Prosopography*, 201 s. v. “Fl. Belisarius 1.”

³² BG 2.7.13: “Μετὰ δὲ ἀλλήλοις ἐπὶ τῇ ἐκεχειρίᾳ ὁμήρους ἔδωσαν, Ζήωνα μὲν Ῥωμαῖοι, Γότθοι δὲ Οὐλίαν, οὐκ ἀφανῆ ἄνδρα, ἐφ’ ᾧ δὴ ἐν τρισὶ μηνὶ μηδεμιᾷ ἐς ἀλλήλους ἐφόδῳ χρῆσονται, ἕως οἱ πρέσβεις ἐκ Βυζαντίου ἐπανήκοντες γνώμην τὴν βασιλείας

Meanwhile, however, the garrison of Portus (today's Porto) runs out of supplies so that Vittigis is forced to order its retreat.³³ Taking advantage of these circumstances, Paulos, the commander of one of the contingents of Isaurians³⁴ fighting for the Romans, occupies the nearby Portus from Ostia—a course of action he is able to repeat when it comes to Centumcellae (today's Civitavecchia) and Albanum (today's Albano) near Rome. Now the enemies are surrounded on all sides.³⁵

The occupation of the three cities prompts the Goths to demand their restoration from Belisarius because they feel deceived. As the envoys argue, there was a specific reason (“κατά τινα χρείαν”) why Vittigis ordered his soldiers out of Portus, and the same applied in the cases of Centumcellae and Albanum; the Romans however have acted contrary to the agreements reached shortly before.³⁶

In contrast, Belisarius fails to see any injustice in his actions and considers it appropriate to send away the detachment of his enemies with laughter (“ξὺν γέλῳτι”). In his opinion their accusations are only an excuse (“παραπέτασμα”) as everyone knows exactly why the Goths had to leave these cities.³⁷ Since the Goths have delivered only spurious reasons (“κατά

ἀγγείλωσιν.”

³³ BG 2.7.16: “Γότθοι τε, οἱ τὸ ἐν Πόρτῳ φρούριον εἶχον, ἐπιλελοιπότην σφᾶς τῶν ἀναγκαίων ἐξέλιπόν τε αὐτὸ Οὐιτιγίδος γνώμῃ, καὶ ἐς τὸ στρατόπεδον μεταπεμπτοὶ ἦλθον.”

³⁴ Paulos had remained behind in Ostia with some Isaurians after the Romans had brought their provisions of food to Rome without any interventions from the Gothic side, cf. BG 2.7.4–12.

³⁵ BG 2.7.16–20: “Παῦλος δὲ αὐτὸ ξὺν τοῖς Ἰσαύροις ἐξ Οὐστίας καταλαβὼν ἔσχεν. αἵτιοι δὲ μάλιστα τούτοις δὴ τοῖς βαρβάροις τῶν ἐπιτηδείων τῆς ἀπορίας ἐγένοντο θαλασσοκρατοῦντες Ῥωμαῖοι, καὶ τι αὐτοῖς ἐσκομίζεσθαι τῶν ἀναγκαίων οὐ συγχωροῦντες. διὸ δὴ καὶ πόλιν ἐπιθαλασσίαν, λόγου πολλοῦ ἀξίαν, Κεντουκέλλας ὄνομα, τῶν ἐπιτηδείων σπανίζοντες ὑπὸ τὸν αὐτὸν χρόνον ἐξέλιπον. ἔστι δὲ ἡ πόλις μεγάλη καὶ πολυάνθρωπος, ἐς τὰ Ῥώμης πρὸς ἐσπέραν ἐν Τούσκοις κείμενη, σταδίοις αὐτῆς ὀγδοήκοντα καὶ διακοσίους ἀπέχουσα. καὶ αὐτὴν Ῥωμαῖοι καταλαβόντες ἔτι μᾶλλον ἐπὶ μέγα δυνάμειος ἦλθον, ἐπεὶ καὶ τὸ Ἀλβανῶν πόλισμα ἔσχον, Ῥώμης πρὸς ἀνίσχοντα ἦλιον κείμενον, ἀνακεχωρηκότων ἐνθένδε διὰ τὸν αὐτὸν λόγον τηνικαῦτα τῶν πολεμίων, πανταχόθεν δὲ ἤδη κυκλωσάμενοι τοὺς βαρβάρους ἐν μέσῳ εἶχον.”

³⁶ BG 2.7.21–23: “διὸ δὴ Γότθοι διαλύειν τε τὰ συγκείμενα καὶ τι ἐς Ῥωμαίους κακουργεῖν ὥρων. πέμπαντες οὖν παρὰ Βελισάριον πρέσβεις ἠδίκησθαι σφᾶς ἐν σπονδαῖς ἔφασαν. Οὐιτιγίδος γὰρ Γότθους τοὺς ἐν Πόρτῳ μεταπεμψαμένου κατὰ τινα χρείαν Παῦλόν τε καὶ Ἰσαύρους τὸ ταύτη φρούριον λόγῳ οὐδενὶ καταλαβόντας ἔχειν. ταῦτὸ δὲ τοῦτο ἀμφὶ τε Ἀλβανῶ καὶ Κεντουκέλλαις δῆθεν τῷ λόγῳ ἡτιῶντο, ἡπείλουν τε, ἦν μὴ ταῦτα σφίσιν ἀποδιδῶ, οὐκ ἐπιτρέψειν.”

³⁷ BG 2.7.24: “Βελισάριος δὲ ξὺν γέλῳτι αὐτοὺς ἀπεπέμψατο, παραπέτασμα μὲν εἶναι ταύτην

τινα χρεΐαν,” “τῷ λόγῳ” the Roman commander does not react with factual arguments either but rather mocks and taunts his adversaries. With both his words and his laughter he demonstrates that he deems it legitimate to exploit the Goths’ inferior position.

The probable reason why Belisarius did not recognize any contradiction between his actions and the former agreements is that he did not even count on a success of the negotiations between Vittigis and Justinian; rather, he only tried to delay the inevitable conflict.³⁸ That is why the result he achieves with his less than diplomatic approach is not surprising: “καὶ τὸ λοιπὸν ὑποψία τινὶ ἐς ἀλλήλους ἐχρῶντο” (“From this moment on they encountered each other with distrust”).³⁹

Encouraging Laughter

Immediately after the envoys’ visit he adopts other measures which prove that he does not expect a peaceful solution of the conflict. The commander John receives the order to take his cavalry and another part of the army and to set up winter camp in the area of Picenum.⁴⁰ If the enemies keep the truce, his orders are not to do anything; this, however, in Belisarius’s opinion is merely a remote possibility as it is only mentioned in a brief clause. Should the Goths break the agreements, John’s instructions are to make sudden attacks with his troops on

δὴ τὴν αἰτίαν εἰπὼν, ἀγνοεῖν δὲ οὐδένα ὅτου δὴ ἔνεκα τὰ χωρία ταῦτα Γότθοι ἐκλίποινεν.” Veh’s translation is already a clear interpretation but conveys the basic message of the text; he translates “ἔνν γέλωτι” into German with “mit Hohn und Spott” (with scorn and mockery), cf. *Prokop, Gotenkriege*, ed. Veh, 273.

³⁸ Cf. *Prokop, Gotenkriege*, ed. Veh, 1037: “Bei Belisars Grundeinstellung war mit erfolgreichen Ausgleichsverhandlungen zwischen Byzanz und den Goten nicht zu rechnen. Er sah von Anfang an im Waffenstillstand nur ein Mittel, um sich weiter verstärken zu können und dann bei günstiger Gelegenheit erneut zum Angriff überzugehen” (With Belisar’s fundamental attitude there was no hope for successful negotiations to achieve a balance between Byzantium and the Goths. From the start he considered the ceasefire only as a means to strengthen his own position and then to go on attack again at a good opportunity).

³⁹ BG 2.7.25. Contrary to this episode, Belisarius shows much more skills when applying his knowledge in the field of diplomacy in the example above in BP 2.21.10.

⁴⁰ BG 2.7.25–27: “ἔπειτα δὲ Βελισάριος, ἐπεὶ Ῥώμην εἶδε στρατιωτῶν πλήθει ἀκμάζουσιν, ἄλλους τε ἰππέας ἐς χωρία Ῥώμης μακράν που ἄποθεν περιέπεμπε καὶ Βιταλιανὸν τὸν ἀδελφιδοῦν Ἰωάννην ἐκέλευε ξὺν τοῖς ἐπομένοις ἰππεῦσιν, ὀκτακοσίοις οὖσιν, ἀμφὶ πόλιν Ἄλβαν διαχειμάζειν, ἐν Πικηνοῖς κειμένην· καὶ οἱ τῶν τε Βαλεριανῶ ἐπομένων τετρακοσίους ξυνέπεμψεν, ὧν Δαμιανὸς ὁ Βαλεριανοῦ ἀδελφιδοῦς ἦρχε, καὶ τῶν αὐτοῦ ὑπασπιστῶν ὀκτακοσίους ἄνδρας, διαφερόντως ἀγαθοὺς τὰ πολέμια. οἷς δὴ δορυφόρους δύο, Σοῦνταν τε καὶ Ἀδην, ἐπέστησε, καὶ αὐτοὺς μὲν Ἰωάννη ἐπεσθαι, ὅπῃ ἂν αὐτὸς ἐξηγοῖτο, ἐκέλευε.”

all the villages in the province of Picenum, take the people there as prisoners and loot all the possessions. Besides that, Belisarius adds detailed instructions on how to execute his orders.⁴¹

If this course of action proves successful, the army is to move on; in case of a failure, however, it should remain in place or withdraw so that the enemy would not be at their back.⁴² The spoils of war are to be secured as a whole so that they can be distributed equitably among the soldiers.⁴³ After having repeated Belisarius's instructions in indirect speech, Procopius renders the general's concluding remark literally—together with the remark that he had added it “ξὺν γέλωτι” (“with laughter”): “Οὐ γὰρ δίκαιον ὑφ’ ἑτέρων μὲν τοὺς κηφήνας πόνῳ μεγάλῳ ἀπόλλυσθαι, ἄλλους δὲ τοῦ μέλιτος οὐδεμιᾷ τάλαιπωρία ὀνίνασθαι” (“For it would not be befitting for the bees to be killed by some with a great effort, whereas others enjoy the honey without any contribution of their own”).⁴⁴

Belisarius expects a positive outcome of the enterprise, which is confirmed by the metaphor at the end of his speech as well as the fact that a successful outcome is discussed far more extensively than a failure. By this position, it is characterized as especially important and, as it takes a successful troop movement for granted, it is geared toward lowering the tensions in view of the anything but harmless enterprise; in this sense it should be interpreted as an encouragement. On the other hand it demonstrates Belisarius's own arrogance as the victory against the enemies is seen as a matter of fact. These functions are not only supported but actually determined by the laughter. It forms a bridge to the humorous conclusion of the speech, which takes the inferiority of the

⁴¹ BG 2.7.27–31: “τῷ δὲ Ἰωάννῃ ἐπήγγελε, τέως μὲν τὰ ξυγκείμενα σφίσι φυλάττοντας ὁρᾷ τοὺς πολεμίους, ἡσυχῇ μένειν· ὅταν δέ οἱ τὴν ἐκεχειρίαν αὐτοῖς λελύσθαι ξυμβαίῃ, ποιεῖν κατὰ τάδε· παντὶ μὲν τῷ στρατῷ ἄφνω τε καὶ ἐξ ἐπιδρομῆς καταθεῖν τὴν Πικηνῶν χώραν, ἅπαντά τε ἐξῆς περιμόντα τὰ ἐκείνῃ χωρία καὶ αὐτοῖς πρὸ τῆς φήμης ἐπιδημοῦντα. ταύτης γὰρ σχεδόν τι ἀπάσης τῆς χώρας ἄνδρας μὲν οὐδαμῇ ἀπολελεῖσθαι, πάντων ἐπὶ Ῥώμην ὡς φαίνεται στρατευσαμένων, παῖδας δὲ καὶ γυναῖκας τῶν πολεμίων καὶ χρήματα πανταχῇ εἶναι. ἐξανδραποδίζειν οὖν καὶ ληΐζεσθαι τὰ ἐν ποσὶν ἅπαντα φυλασσόμενον μὴ ποτε Ῥωμαίων τινὶ τῶν ταύτῃ ὥκημένων λυμῆνται. ἦν δὲ πῃ χωρίῳ ἐντύχη, ἄνδρας τε καὶ ὀχύρωμα, ὡς τὸ εἰκὸς, ἔχοντι, πάσῃ αὐτοῦ δυνάμει ἀποπειράσασθαι.”

⁴² BG 2.7.32f.: “καὶ ἦν μὲν ἐλεῖν δύνηται, ἐς τὰ πρόσω ἰέναι, τοῦ πρᾶγματος δὲ οἱ, ἂν οὕτω τύχοι, ἀντιστατοῦντος, ἀπελαύνειν ὀπίσω, ἢ αὐτοῦ μένειν. προοῖοντι γὰρ οἱ καὶ τοῦτο δὴ τὸ ὀχύρωμα κατὰ νώτου ἀπολιπόντι κίνδυνος πολὺς ἐπὶ πλείστον ἔσται, ἐπεὶ οὐποτ’ ἀμύνειν σφίσιν εὐπετῶς ἔξουσιν, ἦν που ἐνοχλοῖντο πρὸς τῶν ἐναντίων.”

⁴³ BG 2.7.33: “τὴν δὲ Λεῖαν φυλάσσειν ἅπασαν, ὅπως ἂν αὐτὴν ὀρθῶς καὶ δικαίως ἡ στρατιὰ διανέμοιτο.”

⁴⁴ BG 2.7.34.

enemies as a given, but first and foremost, it wants to encourage the Roman soldiers to give their best and shows them what they could achieve in case of a victory.⁴⁵

Once Again Mocking Laughter

Last but not least, there is an episode in the eighth book of the *Bella* where the eunuch Narses, who had been entrusted with the command of the army in Italy,⁴⁶ shows his mockery of the enemies by laughing. A few days after having reached Ravenna with his troops in the summer of 552,⁴⁷ he receives a letter from Usdrilas, the Gothic commander of Ariminum. In that letter Usdrilas implicitly accuses the Romans of cowardice for hiding in Ravenna and shying away from battle with the enemy because they find themselves illegally as a motley crew of barbarians in a foreign country. It should certainly be interpreted as a provocation when, in the last sentence of his short letter, Usdrilas demands from the Romans that they face the Goths in battle.⁴⁸

Narses reacts to this letter with laughter (“γελάσας”) as he considers such boasting (“ἀλαζονεία”) highly inappropriate.⁴⁹ Consequently, he leaves with

⁴⁵ John sets out immediately after the speech, BG 2.7.34: “τοσαῦτα μὲν ἐπιστείλας Βελισάριος Ἰωάννην ξὺν τῷ στρατεύματι ἔπεμψεν.” *Prokop, Gotenkriege*, ed. Otto Veh, 1038, emphasizes that the two recently depicted episodes reveal Belisarius’s plans: “Belisars Haltung gegenüber den gotischen Gesandten und der an Johannes erteilte Auftrag lassen eindeutig die Absicht erkennen, bei nächstbestener Gelegenheit den Waffenstillstand zu brechen” (Belisar’s attitude toward the Gothic emissary and his charge for John allow to recognize clearly the intention to break the ceasefire at the next best opportunity).

⁴⁶ Cf. BG 4.21.18–21.

⁴⁷ Cf. Martindale, *Prosopography*, 917 s. v. “Narses 1” and *Prokop, Gotenkriege*, ed. Veh, 1099.

⁴⁸ BG 4.28.1–3: “Τοῖς δὲ ἀμπὶ Ναρσῆν ἀφικομένοις ἐς Ράβενναν πόλιν ἀνεμῖγνυντο Βαλεριανὸς καὶ Ἰουστίνος οἱ στρατηγοί, καὶ εἴ τι ἄλλο στράτευμα Ῥωμαίων ταύτῃ ἐλέλειπτο. ἐπειδὴ δὲ αὐτοῖς ἑννέα ἡμερῶν χρόνος ἐς Ράβενναν ἐτέτριπτο, Οὐσδρίλας, Γότθος ἀνὴρ, διαφερόντως ἀγαθὸς τὰ πολέμια, τοῦ ἐν Αῤιμίνῳ φυλακτηρίου ἄρχων, πρὸς Βαλεριανὸν ἔγραψε τάδε: “Πάντα ταῖς φήμαις καταλαβόντες, τοῖς τε φάσμασιν ἡδὲ ζύμπασαν Ἰταλίαν συσχόντες καὶ ὀφρυάσαντες οὐχ ὅσα γε τὰ ἀνθρώπεια, ταύτῃ τε Γότθους, ὥσπερ οἶεσθε, δεδιξάμενοι, εἴτα κάθησθε νῦν ἐν Ραβέννῃ τῷ μὲν ἀποκεκρῦφθαι ὥς ἦκιστα τοῖς πολεμίοις ἐνδηλοι, οἶμαι, ξυμφρουροῦντες ἔτι τὸ φρόνημα τοῦτο, βαρβάρων δὲ πάμμικτῳ ὀμίλῳ τὴν οὐδαμόθεν προσήκουσαν ὑμῖν κατατρίβοντες χώραν. ἀλλ’ ἀνάσθητε ὅτι τάχιστα καὶ πολεμίων ἔργων τὸ λοιπὸν ἄπτεσθε, δεῖξατέ τε ὑμᾶς αὐτοὺς Γότθοις, μηδὲ ἀναρτήσητε μακροτέραις ἐλπίσιν ἡμᾶς, προσδεχομένους ἐκ παλαιοῦ τὸ θέαμα.” ἡ μὲν γραφὴ τοσαῦτα ἐδήλου.”

⁴⁹ BG 4.28.4: “ἐπειδὴ δὲ ταῦτα Ναρσῆς ἀπενεχθέντα εἶδε, Γότθων τῆς ἀλαζονείας γελάσας, καθίστατο εὐθύς παντὶ τῷ στρατῷ ἐς τὴν ἔξοδον, φρουράν ξὺν Ἰουστίνῳ ἐν Ραβέννῃ ἀπολιπών.”

the majority of the army to cross the river near Ariminum (today's Rimini), which is under Gothic control.⁵⁰ While doing so, Usdrilas is unexpectedly killed by a Herulian from the Roman army. Narses's soldiers consider this to be proof that God is inimical to the Goths: Their intention of ambushing the enemies' commander has failed and instead their own commander has received the just punishment for his pride.⁵¹ Narses acts superior already in advance because it is conceivable for him that he has the stronger position and that Usdrilas just wanted to provoke him—the following course of events renders his position even more plausible as the Goths do not offer any further resistance after Usdrilas's death so that he can build a bridge without any problems and is able to lead his army across the river.⁵²

Conclusion

When comparing these examples, it becomes evident that both Belisarius and Narses laugh because they want to express their superiority. The different examples of laughter furthermore have specific nuances such as, e.g., mockery (as is the case in most of the discussed examples) or encouragement (BG 2.7.34). It accompanies verbal expressions as a performative act and can contribute to the tenor of a speech with regards to content (BP 2.21.10). However, it can also be employed to replace an argument (BG 2.7.24). In BG 1.22.2ff. and 4.28.4 it is used instead of a speech and works as a symbolic means of communication, i.e., it is the only carrier of the message.

Mocking Laughter of a Whole Town

Finally, there is one other relevant episode from the *Bella* which deals with the laughter of a whole group of people. After the Persian king Chosroes with his army has marched to Antioch in 540,⁵³ he sends his interpreter Paulos to the city walls to offer ten centenaria of gold for the withdrawal of the hostile army, indicating that a smaller sum of money would also be acceptable. Meanwhile,

⁵⁰ Cf. BG 4.28.5–10.

⁵¹ Cf. *Prokop, Gotenkriege*, ed. Veh, 1099.

⁵² BG 4.28.12: "τῶν δὲ πολεμίων ἄτε πεπτωκός τις σφίσι τοῦ ἄρχοντος ἡσυχάζοντων τε καὶ οὐκέτι ἐμποδίων καθισταμένων ὁ Ναρσῆς ἀδεέστερον γεφυρᾷ τὸν ποταμὸν ζεύξας διεβίβασε πόνω οὐδενὶ τὸν στρατὸν ἅπαντα."

⁵³ BP 2.8.1: "Χοσρόης δὲ (καὶ γὰρ οἱ Μέγας χρήματα ἔφασκεν οὐδαμῇ πεπεικέναι Ἀντιοχείας φέρειν) παντὶ τῷ στρατῷ ἐπ' αὐτοὺς ἦει."

envoys of the city pay a visit to the Persian king and accuse him of breaking the peace.⁵⁴

On the following day, a scene takes place on the city walls which shows the Persians unmistakably that their proposal is met with refusal: The Antiochians treat Chosroes with huge arrogance (“πολλὰ ὕβριζον”) and taunt him (“ἐτώθαζον”) with outright laughter (“ξὺν γέλωτι ἀκόσμῳ”) from the battlements. Paulos, who had obviously come for a second time in order to repeat the Persian king’s offer, even has to fear for his life and is only able to escape the arrows aimed at him thanks to his prudence. According to Procopius, the reason for the mockery of the Persian king is that the inhabitants of Antioch do not take anything seriously but pass their time with jokes (“γελοίοις”) and with indiscipline (“ἄταξία”).⁵⁵ They are “undisciplined buffoons”⁵⁶ who with their mocking laughter express that the Persians are completely wrong in thinking their offer will be attractive for the Antiochians.

Their hilarious self-dramatization reflects the inhabitants’ arrogance as they quickly have to realize that they are decidedly not superior to their enemies. Chosroes actually reacts with anger to their—probably ill-conceived—behavior and decides to attack the city walls.⁵⁷ In contrast to the examples before, Procopius’s people are on the losing side, which is why the loss of Antioch is described extensively⁵⁸ as well as with much sympathy for the inhabitants.⁵⁹

⁵⁴ BP 2.8.4f.: “Χοσρόης τε Παῦλον παρὰ τὸν περιβόλον στείλας τοὺς Ἀντιοχέας χρήματα ἤτει, δέκα χρυσοῦ κεντηναρίων ἀπαλλαγῆσθαι ἐνθένδε, ἐνδηλός τε ἦν καὶ τούτων ἐλάσσω ἐπὶ τῇ ἀναχωρήσει ληψόμενος. καὶ τότε μὲν ἦκοντες παρὰ τὸν Χοσρόην οἱ πρέσβεις, εἰπόντες τε ἀμφὶ τῇ διαλύσει τῆς εἰρήνης πολλὰ καὶ πρὸς ἐκεῖνον ἀκούσαντες ἀνεχώρησαν.”—Paulos is called “έρμηνεύς” in BP 2.6.22f.

⁵⁵ BP 2.8.6f.: “τῇ δὲ ἐπιούσῃ ἡμέρᾳ τῶν Ἀντιοχέων ὁ δῆμος (εἰσὶ γὰρ οὐ κατεσπουδασμένοι, ἀλλὰ γελοίοις τε καὶ ἄταξία ἱκανῶς ἔχονται) πολλὰ ἐς τὸν Χοσρόην ὕβριζόν τε ἀπὸ τῶν ἐπάλλεων καὶ ξὺν γέλωτι ἀκόσμῳ ἐτώθαζον· καὶ Παῦλον τοῦ περιβόλου ἐγγὺς ἦκοντα παραινούντά τε χρημάτων ὀλίγων σφᾶς τε αὐτοὺς καὶ τὴν πόλιν ὠνεῖσθαι, ὀλίγου ἐδέησαν τοξεύσαντες κτείνειν, εἰ μὴ προῖδὼν ἐφυλάξατο.”

⁵⁶ “Zuchtlose Possenreißer” (“γελοίοις τε καὶ ἄταξία ἔχονται”), translation taken from *Prokop, Perserkriege*, ed. Veh, 255.

⁵⁷ BP 2.8.7: “διὸ δὲ ζέων τῷ θυμῷ ὁ Χοσρόης τειχομαχεῖν ἔγνων.”

⁵⁸ The depiction of the conquest of Antioch takes up the rest of chapter 8 as well as chapter 9.

⁵⁹ Cf. *Prokop, Perserkriege*, ed. Veh, 489.

3. The Enemies' Laughter

There are only a few examples for laughter of the Romans' enemies in Procopius's *Bella*: The enemies only laugh half as much in comparison to Belisarius and his compatriots. In addition, their laughter turns out to have a considerably different function from that of the Romans.

Laughter as Deception

In the context of the siege of Daras in northern Mesopotamia in 541,⁶⁰ Procopius describes an event that finally leads to a failure for the Persian king. After Chosroes's arrival, the Roman general Martinos, who happens to be in the city, orders that measures be taken for its defense.⁶¹ Daras is surrounded by a circular wall of considerable height and together with an outer lower wall it offers the best prerequisites for a defense against the enemies so that their first attack on the western side of the city does not pay off.⁶²

On the eastern side of the city however, Chosroes finds a weak point: The circular wall there is not built on rock; the Persian soldiers therefore manage to dig a ditch—without the Romans' noticing—in order to cut a subterranean way through to the city.⁶³ When they are already between the two walls, one man from Chosroes's army alone repairs to the inner enclosure, ostensibly (“δόξαν παρείχετο”) picking up the arrows shot by the Romans. While doing so, he

⁶⁰ BP 2.13.29: “ταῦτα μὲν ἐν τῇ πρώτῃ Χοσροῦ ἐσβολῇ Ῥωμαίοις ξυνέβη, καὶ τὸ θέρος μὲν ἐτελεύτα.” Cf. Martindale, 208f. s. v. “Fl. Belisarius 1.”

⁶¹ Martinos had been sent to the east even before Belisarius and the other generals who had been ordered back from Italy; cf. BG 3.1.1 and BP 2.14.8f. as well as *Prokop, Perserkriege*, ed. Veh, 493.—BP 2.13.16: “Ἐς Δάρας τε ἀφικόμενος ἐς πολιορκίαν καθίστατο. ἔνδοθεν δὲ Ῥωμαῖοι καὶ Μαρτίνος ὁ στρατηγὸς (καὶ γὰρ ἐνταῦθα ὦν ἔτυχε) τὰ ἐς ἀντίστασιν ἐξηγούοντο.”

⁶² BP 2.13.17–20: “δύο δὲ ἡ πόλις τείχεσι περιβέβληται, ὧν τὸ μὲν ἐντὸς μέγα τε καὶ ἀξιοθέατον ἀτεχνῶς ἐστίν (ἐς ὕψος γὰρ διήκει πύργος μὲν ἕκαστος ποδῶν ἑκατὸν, τὸ δὲ ἄλλο τεῖχος ἐξήκοντα), τὸ δὲ ἐκτὸς πολλῶ μὲν ἔλασσον συμβαίνει εἶναι, ἄλλως δὲ ἐχυρὸν τε καὶ λόγου πολλοῦ ἀξιὸν ἐστίν. τὸ δὲ μεταξὺ χωρίον εὖρος οὐχ ἥσσον ἢ πεντήκοντα ἔχει ποδῶν· ἐνταῦθα εἰώθασι Δαρηνοὶ τοὺς τε βόας καὶ τὰλλα ζῶα πολεμίων σφίσι ἐγκειμένων ἐμβάλλεσθαι. τὰ μὲν οὖν πρῶτα ὁ Χοσρόης προσβολὴν ποιησάμενος ἐς τὰ πρὸς ἐσπέραν τοῦ περιβόλου πλῆθει τε βελῶν βιασάμενος, τὰς πύλας τείχους τοῦ βραχέος ἐνέπρησεν. ἐντὸς μέντοι γενέσθαι οὐδεὶς τῶν βαρβάρων ἐτόλμησεν.”

⁶³ BP 2.13.20f.: “ἔπειτα δὲ κατώρυχα ποιεῖσθαι λάθρα ἐς τὰ πρὸς ἔω τῆς πόλεως ἔγνω. ταύτῃ γὰρ μόνον ὀρύσσεσθαι ἢ γῇ οἷα τέ ἐστιν, ἐπεὶ τὰ ἄλλα τοῦ περιβόλου ἐπὶ πέτρας τοῖς δειμαμένοις πεποιήται. οἱ γοῦν Πέρσαι ἀπὸ τῆς τοῦ τάφρου ἀρξάμενοι ὥρυσσον. ἤς δὴ βαθείας κομιδὴ οὐσης οὔτε καθεωρῶντο πρὸς τῶν πολεμίων οὔτε αὐτοῖς τινα αἰσθησιν τοῦ ποιουμένου παρείχοντο.”

holds his shield in front of him (“προβεβλημένος”) the way a soldier usually does before an attack; with his action the man therefore creates the outward impression (“ἔδοκει”) that he is teasing (“ἔρεσχελεῖν”) the defenders of the city who are looking down on him from the walls and that he is taunting them with laughter (“ξὺν γέλωτι τωθάζειν”).

After his provocative demeanor has caught everyone’s attention, he manages to disclose Chosroes’s plan to the Roman adversaries and advises them to be alert and to arrange for their rescue as effectively as possible.⁶⁴ Subsequently, the soldier returns to the Persians; meanwhile, the Romans make preparations for their defense and are able in part to kill their enemies and in part to put them to flight. Chosroes has to admit defeat and returns to Persia as he sees no further chances for occupying Daras.⁶⁵

The laughter of the man from Chosroes’s army (“εἷς ἐκ τοῦ Χοσρόου στρατοπέδου”) serves as a deception in addition to the feint attack he tauntingly pretends to carry out by himself. Procopius emphasizes furthermore that his treachery takes place in broad daylight (“ἀμφὶ ἡμέραν μέσῃν”) and in plain view (cf. “τοῖς ὁρώσι”) so that his deceptive maneuver may appear credible. As a matter of fact, the reader does not get the full particulars on how the man manages to reveal the plan to the Persians; at best, we can assume that he shouts to the Romans who observe him from the battlements as his other actions are carried out in gestures, i.e., in a nonverbal manner. Procopius

⁶⁴ BP 2.13.22f.: “ἦδη μὲν οὖν ὑπέδυσαν τὰ θεμέλια τοῦ ἐκτὸς τείχους, ἔμελλον δὲ καὶ κατὰ τὴν μεταξὺ χώραν ἐκατέρου περιβόλου γινόμενοι ὀλίγῳ ὕστερον καὶ τὸ μέγα τεῖχος ἀμείψαντες τὴν πόλιν κατὰ κράτος ἐλεῖν, ἀλλ’ (οὐ γὰρ αὐτὴν ἔδει Πέρσαις ἀλῶναι) εἷς ἐκ τοῦ Χοσρόου στρατοπέδου ἀμφὶ ἡμέραν μέσῃν ἄγχιστά πη τοῦ περιβόλου μόνος ἀφίκετο, εἴτε ἄνθρωπος ὢν εἴτε τι ἄλλο ἀνθρώπου κρεῖσσον, δόξαν τε τοῖς ὁρώσι παρείχετο, ὅτι δὴ τὰ βέλη ξυλλέγονι, ἅπερ ἐκ τοῦ τείχους Ῥωμαῖοι ὀλίγῳ πρότερον ἐπὶ τοὺς ἐνοχλοῦντας βαρβάρους ἀφήκαν. ταῦτα τε ποιῶν καὶ τὴν ἀσπίδα προβεβλημένος ἔρεσχελεῖν τε τοὺς ἐν ταῖς ἐπάλξεσι καὶ ξὺν γέλωτι τωθάζειν ἔδοκει. εἴτα φράσας αὐτοῖς τὸν πάντα λόγον ἐργηγορέναι πάντας ἐκέλευε καὶ ὥς ἐνὶ μάλιστα τῆς σωτηρίας ἐπιμελεῖσθαι.”

⁶⁵ BP 2.13.24–28: “καὶ ὁ μὲν ταῦτα σημήνας ἀπιὼν ὤχετο, Ῥωμαῖοι δὲ τὰ ἐν μέσῳ τείχους ἐκατέρου θορύβῳ πολλῶ καὶ ταραχῇ ἐκέλευον σκάπτειν. καὶ Πέρσαι μὲντοι οὐκ εἰδότες τὰ πρασσόμενα οὐδέν τι ἦσσαν ἔργου εἶχοντο. τῶν μὲν οὖν βαρβάρων ὁρθὴν τινα ἐνεργεῖν ποιουμένων ὁδὸν ἐπὶ τῆς πόλεως τεῖχος, τῶν δὲ Ῥωμαίων Θεοδώρου γνώμη, ἐπὶ σοφίᾳ τῇ καλουμένῃ μηχανικῇ λογίου ἀνδρός, ἐγκαρσίαν τε τὴν διώρυχα ἐργαζομένων καὶ βάθους ἱκανῶς ἔχουσαν, ξυνέβη Πέρσας κατὰ μέσον τοῖν περιβόλοιν γεγεννημένους ἐκ τοῦ αἰφνιδίου ἐμπεσεῖν ἐς τὴν Ῥωμαίων κατώρυχα. καὶ αὐτῶν τοὺς μὲν πρῶτους Ῥωμαῖοι ἔκτειναν, οἱ δὲ ὀπισθεν φυγόντες κατὰ τάχος ἐς τὸ στρατόπεδον διεσώθησαν. διώκειν γὰρ αὐτοὺς ἐν σκοτῷ Ῥωμαῖοι οὐδαμῇ ἔγνωσαν. ταύτης οὖν τῆς πείρας ὁ Χοσρόης ἀποτυχὼν ἐλεῖν τε τὴν πόλιν μηχανῇ τὸ λοιπὸν οὐδεμιᾷ ἐλπίσας, τοῖς πολιορκουμένοις ἐς λόγους ἦλθε, χιλιά τε κεκομισμένος ἀργύρου σταθμὰ ἐς τὰ Περσῶν ἦθη ἐχώρει.”

himself speculates that the depicted event (i.e., the salvation of the city from the Persians) could have taken place under the influence of supernatural forces. First of all, he remarks in a subordinate clause that it was not predetermined for the city to be conquered by the Persians (“οὐ γὰρ αὐτὴν ἔδει Πέρσαις ἀλῶναι”). Besides, according to Procopius, the decisive importance for a failure of the enterprise lies in the hands of the soldier, who in his opinion is either a human being or something different more powerful than a human being (“εἴτε ἄνθρωπος ὢν εἴτε τι ἄλλο ἀνθρώπου κρείσσον”).⁶⁶

The laughter and the mockery of the Romans in the aforementioned episode merely serve to hide the traitorous intentions of the Persian man. The garrison in Daras only has to pretend to be taunted; the soldiers are actually the beneficiaries of this behavior and have fate on their side because in the end they are able to save the city from conquest.

Humiliating Laughter

Only a few chapters later, Procopius once again writes about the Persians' scorn for the Romans. Having reached Mesopotamia in 541,⁶⁷ Belisarius sets out from Daras for an offensive against Nisibis.⁶⁸ However, he does not order to set up camp in close vicinity to the city but about forty-two stades away: thus, as Belisarius states in a speech, the enemies will be forced to take a longer retreat during battle, which distinctly augments the chances of the Roman enterprise; should they, on the contrary, set up camp in the immediate neighborhood, the Persians would have a well protected base of operations and could retreat into the city if necessary.⁶⁹

Even when Belisarius manages to convince the majority of the other commanders with his arguments, Petros and John move up to ten stades to Nisibis with their regiments and furthermore disregard Belisarius's command

⁶⁶ BP 2.13.22. For the importance of fate (τύχη) or divine influence on human actions, cf. Brodka, *Geschichtsphilosophie*, 21–61; Cameron, *Procopius*, 113–33; Evans, *Procopius*, 118–25; Kaldellis, *Procopius*, 165–221.

⁶⁷ BP 2.16.1: “Ἐν τούτῳ δὲ γενόμενος Βελισάριος ἐν Μεσοποταμίᾳ πανταχόθεν τὸν στρατὸν ἤγειρε, καὶ τινὰς ἐς τὰ Περσῶν ἦθη ἐπὶ κατασκοπῇ ἔπεμπεν.”

⁶⁸ BP 2.18.1: “Ἐν τούτῳ δὲ Βελισάριός τε καὶ ὁ Ῥωμαίων στρατὸς . . . κοσμῶ πολλῶ ἐκ Δάρας πόλεως ἐπὶ Νισιβίν ἤεισαν.” Cf. Martindale, *Prosopography*, 208f. s. v. “Fl. Belisarius 1.”

⁶⁹ Cf. BP 2.18.2–15.

to deploy and be ready for battle.⁷⁰ Their rash behavior is promptly exploited by the Persian commander Nabedes.⁷¹ He is able to put to flight the Roman soldiers (fifty men are even killed) and to obtain Petros's standard ("τὸ τοῦ Πέτρου σημεῖον").⁷² Only the intervention of Belisarius and his troops turns the tables for now the Persians have to flee (150 of them are killed) and to retreat behind the city walls.⁷³

On the following day, when both parties are back at their original positions, the Persians act as winners by erecting the standard they obtained from Petros on a tower as a trophy and by attaching (garlicky) sausages ("ἀλλᾶντας") to it. This symbolic demonstration of their superiority is especially poignant as the Persians mock their enemies with laughter ("τοῖς πολεμίοις ξὺν γέλωτι ἐπετώθαζον"). Without any doubt, their behavior is supposed to be a humiliation of the Romans but it turns out to be even more drastic because it is only the stealing of the standard that enables them to act as winners after the skirmish; apart from that, nothing more than a status quo has been reached. That is why the Persians' performative acting distinctly loses poignancy by Procopius's comment that they subsequently did not dare leave Nisibis any more and limited their military activity to the protection of their city.⁷⁴ Finally, it is conspicuous that the blame for the failure of the Roman plan does not lie

⁷⁰ Cf. BP 2.18.16–18. For this enterprise Belisarius had not received the supreme command from Justinian so that Petros's and John's course of action was not in violence of an order by a superior, cf. Veh (1970), 496.

⁷¹ BP 2.18.19: "ὅπερ κατιδὼν ὁ Ναβέδης δρόμῳ πολλῷ ἐπήγεν ἐπ' αὐτοὺς τὸ Περσῶν στράτευμα."

⁷² BP 2.18.22: "ἐπελθόντες τε Πέρσαι Ῥωμαίους οὐχ ὑποστάντες τὴν ἔφοδον πόνῳ οὐδενὶ ἐς φυγὴν ἔτρεψαν, ἐπισπόμενοι δὲ πεντήκοντά τε διέφθειραν καὶ τὸ τοῦ Πέτρου σημεῖον ἀρπάσαντες ἔσχον."

⁷³ BP 2.18.23–25: "ἅπαντάς τε ἂν ἐν ταύτῃ δὴ τῇ διώξει ἔκτειναν ἐς οὐδεμίαν ἀλκὴν ὁρῶντας, εἰ μὴ Βελισάριός τε καὶ ὁ ξὺν αὐτῷ στρατὸς καταλαβὼν διεκώλυσε. πρῶτους γὰρ ἀπάντων ξὺν δόρασι μακροῖς τε καὶ συχνοῖς Γότθους ἐπιόντας Πέρσαι οὐχ ὑπομείναντες ἐς φυγὴν ὥρμητο. ἐπισπόμενοι τε Ῥωμαῖοι ξὺν Γότθοις πεντήκοντα καὶ ἑκατὸν ἔκτειναν. δι' ὀλίγου γὰρ τῆς διώξεως γενομένης οἱ λοιποὶ κατὰ τάχος ἐντὸς τοῦ περιβόλου ἐγένοντο."

⁷⁴ BP 2.18.26: "τότε μὲν οὖν Ῥωμαῖοι ξύμπαντες ἐς τὸ Βελισαρίου στρατόπεδον ἀπεχώρησαν, οἱ δὲ Πέρσαι τῇ ἐπιγινομένη ἡμέρᾳ ἐν πύργῳ τινὶ ἔστησαν ἀντὶ τροπαίου τὸ Πέτρου σημεῖον, ἀλλᾶντάς τε αὐτοῦ ἀποκρεμάσαντες τοῖς πολεμίοις ξὺν γέλωτι ἐπετώθαζον, ἐπεξιέναι μέντοι οὐκέτι ἐτόλμων, ἀλλὰ τὴν πόλιν ἐν τῷ ἀσφαλεῖ διεφύλασσον." When gauging the situation after the battle, it has to be taken into consideration that three times as many Persians had been killed by the Romans than the other way round.

with Belisarius but rather obviously with Petros because he did not follow the prudent advice of the general so highly esteemed by Procopius.⁷⁵

Laughter About Fate

Finally, there is one instance left that is considerably different from all the others before. After a siege of three months of the mountain Papua by the Roman officer Pharas, the Vandal king Gelimer realizes in March 534 that his people cannot cope any longer with starvation.⁷⁶ In a letter he informs the Romans that he wants to capitulate if Belisarius vouches for the fulfillment of the imperial promises Pharas had described to him shortly before.⁷⁷ Belisarius is informed about this development of the situation and rejoices in having Gelimer brought close to Carthage, where he himself is staying at the moment.⁷⁸

The meeting with Belisarius however triggers an unusual reaction in the Vandal king: He starts laughing, which, according to Procopius, is appropriate for the situation and cannot be hidden (“γελῶν γέλωτα οὔτε φαῦλον οὔτε κρύπτεσθαι ἱκανὸν ὄντα”). Probably Procopius also knows that this behavior seems strange as he reports first of all that some of the spectators present had entertained the suspicion that due to extreme suffering the Vandal king had forfeited his mental abilities completely and that he had started laughing without any reason—a sure sign that he had already lost his sanity.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ Cf. *Prokop, Perserkriege*, ed. Veh, 496. Already in chapter 16 Procopius emphasizes some of the aspects of the following events that prove that Belisarius was not the only one responsible for the failure of the following campaign (*Prokop, Perserkriege*, ed. Veh, 495).

⁷⁶ BV 2.7.1: “Ἡδὴ δὲ τριῶν μηνῶν χρόνος ἐν ταύτῃ δὴ τῇ προσεδρεΐα ἐτρίβη καὶ ὁ χειμῶν ἐτελεύτα. καὶ ὁ Γελίμερ ἔδεδίει, τοὺς πολιορκοῦντας ἐπ’ αὐτὸν οὐκ εἰς μακρὰν ἀναβήσασθαι ὑποτοπάζων, καὶ τῶν οἱ συγγενῶν παιδίων τὰ πλεῖστα σώματα σκώληκας ἐν ταύτῃ δὴ τῇ τάλαιπωρία ἠφίει.” However, it is only the incident described in §§2–5 that leads to a decrease of Gelimer’s perseverance (“ἐθελύνθη τὴν διάνοιαν”, §6). Cf. Martindale, *Prosopography*, 192 s. v. “Fl. Belisarius 1.”

⁷⁷ BV 2.7.8: “ὅπως μὲντοι τὰ πιστὰ λάβοιμι, ἀναδέχεσθαι Βελισάριον βασιλέα ποιήσιν ἅπαντα, ὅσα μοι ἐναγχος ὑπέδέξω.” The letter is reproduced in §§7–9. Before, there had been a letter (cf. BV 2.6.15–26), in which Pharas appeals to Gelimer to give up his resistance and to surrender. He promises him that Justinian will confer upon him the rank of patrician and that he will appoint him senator as well as provide him with land and money—all of which will be vouched for by Belisarius (BV 2.6.22). Subsequently, this promise is only honored partially despite Belisarius’s pledge in BV 2.7.11 as Gelimer is not ennobled due to his Arian beliefs, cf. BV 2.9.14.

⁷⁸ Cf. BV 2.7.10–13.

⁷⁹ BV 2.7.14: “ἐνθα δὴ ὁ Γελίμερ παρ’ αὐτὸν εἰσῆλθε, γελῶν γέλωτα οὔτε φαῦλον οὔτε

The opinion of his friends is completely opposite: According to them, he has an extremely clear intellect but is of royal lineage and was accustomed to much power and tremendous wealth (“δύναμίν τε ἰσχυρὰν χρήματά τε μεγάλα”) from his childhood onwards. Then he fled, suffered immense fear (“δέος πολὺ”) and had to endure the unfortunate situation (“κακοπάθειαν”) on the mountain Papua. Now, as a prisoner, he has come to know the good and bad sides of fate (“τὰ ἀπὸ τῆς τύχης ἀγαθὰ τε καὶ φλαῦρα”). This has led him to the opinion that human affairs can only be dealt with by laughing loudly.⁸⁰

It is true that Procopius does not explicitly tell the reader which of the two possible interpretations he prefers; nevertheless, he deals only briefly with the “laughter of madness”⁸¹ that outsiders want to recognize in Gelimer’s behavior. He concedes much more space to the statement of Gelimer’s friends, which virtually leads to a rehabilitation of the Vandal king. Gelimer is not out of his mind but only laughs at the vicissitudes of fate as the present situation is so absurd for him that there can be no appropriate reaction.⁸² A long parenthesis shows the stark contrast between his former life as an aristocrat and his present state as a prisoner, with the particle ἀτε indicating that the people close to him consider Gelimer’s despondence to be plausible. At the end of the episode there is the emphatic statement that he cannot show any other reaction but laughter given this stroke of fate. These facts suggest that Procopius was more partial to the second opinion—even if he concludes with a phrase that puts the paragraph before in perspective and which can be found relatively often in similar phrases elsewhere in his work: “περὶ μὲν οὖν τοῦ γέλωτος, ὃν Γελίμερ

κρύπτεσθαι ἱκανὸν ὄντα, τῶν τε αὐτὸν θεωμένων ἔνιοι μὲν τῇ τοῦ πάθους ὑπερβολῇ ἀπάντων τε αὐτὸν ἔκοτῆναι τῶν κατὰ φύσιν ὑπώπτευσον καὶ παραπαίοντα ἤδη λόγῳ οὐδενὶ τὸν γέλωτα ἔχειν.”

⁸⁰ BV 2.7.15: “οἱ μέντοι φίλοι ἀγχίνουν τε τὸν ἄνθρωπον ἐβούλοντο εἶναι καὶ ἄτε οἰκίας μὲν βασιλικῆς γεγονότα, εἰς βασιλείαν δὲ ἀναβεβηκότα, καὶ δύναμίν τε ἰσχυρὰν χρήματά τε μεγάλα ἐκ παιδὸς ἄχρι καὶ ἐς γῆρας περιβαλλόμενον, εἴτα εἰς φυγὴν τε καὶ δέος πολὺ ἐμπεσόντα καὶ κακοπάθειαν τὴν ἐν Παπούα ὑποστάντα, καὶ νῦν ἐν αἰχμαλώτων λόγῳ ἦκοντα, πάντων τε ταύτῃ τῶν ἀπὸ τῆς τύχης ἀγαθῶν τε καὶ φλαύρων ἐν πείρᾳ γεγονότα, ἄλλου οὐδενὸς ἄξια τὰ ἀνθρώπινα ἢ γέλωτος πολλοῦ οἶσθαι εἶναι.”

⁸¹ “Lachen des Wahnsinns,” translation taken from *Prokop, Vandalenkriege*, gr.-germ. ed. Otto Veh (Munich: Heimeran, 1971), 215.

⁸² When taking these considerations into account, the unusual phrasing in BV 2.7.14 that Gelimer’s laughter was not φα λος becomes explicable—it was not ‘something that was not the way it was supposed to be,’ i.e., it was completely appropriate. The basic meaning “(morally) bad” does not make any sense in this context.

ἐγέλα, λεγέτω ὥς πη ἕκαστος γινώσκει, καὶ ἐχθρὸς καὶ φίλος" ("May everyone, friend or foe, think about Gelimer's laughter what he likes!").⁸³

Especially the fact that the king's laughter after his capture is extremely unusual makes it even more credible; it is furthermore probable that Procopius was an eye-witness of the event.⁸⁴ This evidence makes it likely that the episode actually took place; in any case, there is no parallel to this example in Procopius's *Bella*.⁸⁵

Conclusion

After examining these three examples, it becomes evident that the laughter of the Romans' adversaries in the first two cases seems to be showing their superiority only at first glance. According to the facts, at least the way Procopius puts them, there was no case where the enemies were justified showing their mockery of the Romans by laughing because they do not emerge as the winners of the situation in the end. An exceptional significance is given to Gelimer's laughter as it shows the hopelessness of his situation.

4. Laughter and Crying

As follows from the episodes examined above, the Romans' laughter, and especially Belisarius's laughter serves first and foremost to demonstrate to the reader the strategic skills and the prudence of the protagonist of the *Bella*. It constitutes a literary motif that serves to illustrate the superiority of the Romans' own generals over their enemies; only the inhabitants of Antioch, by mocking Chosroes, behave in such an imprudent manner that it does not take them long to be on the losing side.⁸⁶

By contrast, the adversaries' mocking laughter in the first two cases is a sign of their superiority for only a short period of time as it merely seems to erupt

⁸³ "Mit dem Lachen Gelimers mag es nun jeder, Freund oder Feind, halten, wie er mag," BV 2.7.16, translation taken from *Prokop, Vandalenkriege*, ed. Veh, 217.—For the use of such formulaic expressions as a transition, cf. BP 1.4.31, 1.9.19, 1.17.20, 1.20.37, 2.9.13, 2.30.29; BG 1.9.7, 1.14.11, 3.29.20, 4.3.11, 4.12.35, 4.14.54; BV 1.21.5, 2.7.21, 2.13.29.

⁸⁴ Cf. *Prokop, Vandalenkriege*, ed. Veh, 217.

⁸⁵ Gelimer's non-crying in 2.9.11 (see below) is also absolutely remarkable; cf. furthermore *Prokop, Vandalenkriege*, ed. Veh, 419.

⁸⁶ BP 2.8.6f. (see above).

there for the sake of appearance, or rather it merely burst forth there to a very small extent. It is conspicuous that in both episodes a whole group of people acts as protagonists, whereas this only pertains to one of the six examples compiled under point two. A dramatic effect is finally achieved by the account of Gelimer's laughter, about which the author also states his opinion; Procopius seems to show compassion for the Vandal king to a certain degree as he uses a lot of space for repeating the statement of Gelimer's friends which explains and justifies his unusual behavior.

Overall, these deliberations about laughter lead to the conclusion that Procopius's description is obviously geared to reach a high potential of identification for the reader. This thesis may be corroborated by examining in the *Wars* a few examples of crying, the counterpart of laughter.⁸⁷

After Gelimer has gone to Bulla Regia west of Carthage in the autumn of 533⁸⁸ with only a few compatriots and Maurusians, he sends a letter to his brother Tzazon on Sardinia, asking for help against the Romans.⁸⁹ Tzazon reaches the Libyan coast three days after receiving the letter and hurries on to Bulla Regia from there.⁹⁰ When the brothers see each other, dramatic scenes take place, which Procopius narrates with sympathy: For a long time Gelimer and Tzazon remain in a silent embrace and cry (“οὐδὲν μέντοι ἐς ἀλλήλους ἐφθέγγοντο, ἀλλὰ τῷ χεῖρε σφίγγοντες ἔκλαιον”), and the same behavior can also be observed among their soldiers.⁹¹ In view of the misfortune that fate has in store for all of them, no appropriate words can be found; nevertheless, they courageously face the upcoming skirmish together.⁹²

⁸⁷ It is conspicuous that there are twice as many cases of crying than laughter: BP 1.9.6, 1.23.8, 1.24.55, 2.5.13, 2.7.34, 2.9.10, 2.11.19; BV 1.4.23, 1.25.24, 2.2.20, 2.4.23, 2.6.27, 2.6.33, 2.9.11; BG 1.2.9, 1.9.29, 3.1.40, 3.17.2.

⁸⁸ Cf. Martindale, *Prosopography*, 507 s. v. “Gelimer.”

⁸⁹ BV 1.25.1–18.

⁹⁰ BV 1.25.19–22.

⁹¹ BV 1.25.22–24: “ἐνταῦθα συχνὰ ἐλέου πολλοῦ ἄξια Βανδίλοις ξυνέβη, ἅπερ ἔγωγε οὐκ ἂν ἔτι φράσαι ἰκανῶς ἔχοιμι. οἶμαι γὰρ εἰ καὶ αὐτῶν πολεμίων ἀνδρὶ θεατῇ γενέσθαι τετύχηκε, τάχα ἂν καὶ αὐτὸς Βανδίλους τε τότε καὶ τύχην τὴν ἀνθρωπείαν ᾠκτίσατο. ὃ τε Γελίμερ καὶ ὁ Τζάζων ἐπειδὴ ἀλλήλοις τῷ τραχήλῳ περιεβαλέσθην, μεθίεσθαι τὸ λοιπὸν οὐδαμῇ εἶχον, οὐδὲν μέντοι ἐς ἀλλήλους ἐφθέγγοντο, ἀλλὰ τῷ χεῖρε σφίγγοντες ἔκλαιον, καὶ Βανδιλίων τῶν ξὺν Γελίμερι ἕκαστος τῶν τινα ἐκ Σαρδοῦς ἦκοντα περιβαλὼν κατὰ ταῦτά ἐποίει.”

⁹² The acceptance of their own fate by the people involved is depicted in an emotionally highly charged paragraph, which concludes the first book of the *Vandal Wars*: “χρόνον τε συχνὸν ὥσπερ ἀλλήλοις ἐμπεφυκότες, ἡδονῇ τῆς ἐνθύνδε ἀπώναντο, καὶ οὔτε οἱ ἀμφὶ Γελίμερα

After his capture Gelimer shows the same fortitude. When he is led in front of Justinian during Belisarius's triumph in Byzantium in 534,⁹³ he does not show any weakness by mourning his fate (“οὐ ἀπέκλαυσεν”) but stays calm—in this case he is depicted as a strong-minded person precisely because he does not cry.⁹⁴ It is not surprising that Procopius treats him with a certain degree of appreciation as Gelimer embodies the virtues highly esteemed by the Romans.⁹⁵

A striking contrast to this man of exemplary character can be found in the Persian king Chosroes, who demonstrates his perfidy in a macabre way during the occupation of Sura.⁹⁶ When a woman and her small child are abducted from the city, the Persian king observes the scene and is ostensibly moved to tears (“ὥς εἶη δεδακρυμένος”). May God, he implores in front of the people who happen to be next to him, punish the one responsible for this misfortune, thereby obviously alluding to Justinian. There is certainly no doubt about the fact that he himself has brought such suffering to the inhabitants of the city.⁹⁷ By means of his non-crying, Chosroes's reprehensible character becomes

περὶ τοῦ Γώδα (ἐπεὶ αὐτοὺς ἡ παροῦσα τύχη ἐκπλήξασα τὰ πρόσθεν σφίσι σπουδαιότατα δόξαντα εἶναι τοῖς ἡδὴ ἐς ἄγαν ἀπημελημένοις ξυνέτασεν) οὔτε οἱ ἐκ Σαρδοῦς ἦκοντες ἐρωτᾶν τι ἠξίου ἀμφὶ τοῖς ἔν γε Λιβύῃ ξυνενεχθεῖσιν. ἱκανὸς γὰρ αὐτοῖς ὁ χώρος τεκμηριῶσαι τὰ ξυμπεσόντα ἐγίνετο. οὐ μὴν οὐδὲ γυναικῶν ἢ παίδων ἰδίων λόγον ἐποιοῦντό τινα, ἐξεπιστάμενοι ὥς, ἢν τις αὐτοῖς ἐνταῦθα οὐκ εἶη, δηλὸν ὅτι ἡ ἐτελεύτα ἡ ὑπὸ τῶν πολέμιων ταῖς χερσὶ γέγονε—ταῦτα μὲν δὴ ταύτῃ πη ἔσχεν” (BV 1.25.25f.).

⁹³ Cf. Martindale, *Prosopography*, 192f. s. v. “Fl. Belisarius 1.”

⁹⁴ BV 2.9.11: “ὥς δὲ ἐν τῷ ἵπποδρόμῳ Γελίμερ ἐγεγόνει καὶ τὸν τε βασιλέα ἐπὶ βήματος ὑψηλοῦ καθήμενον τὸν τε δῆμον ἐφ’ ἑκάτερα ἐστώτα εἶδε καὶ αὐτὸν οὐ ἦν κακοῦ περισκοπῶν ἔγνω, οὔτε ἀπέκλαυσεν οὔτε ἀνώμοξεν, ἐπιλέγων δε οὐκ ἐπαύσατο κατὰ τὴν Ἑβραίων γραφὴν “ματαιότης ματαιοτάτων, τὰ πάντα ματαιότης.”

⁹⁵ Gelimer's positive character traits that Veh mentions in his translation of the *Vandal Wars* are “Tatkraft und Folgerichtigkeit” (“gumption and consistency”) (417) as well as “Klarheit des Denkens und Festigkeit im Dulden” (“clarity of thought and constancy in sufferance”) (419).

⁹⁶ The seizure of Sura took place before the conquest of Antioch, i.e., in Spring of 540; cf. BP 2.5.8–33.

⁹⁷ BP 2.9.9–11: “ὅς καὶ Σουρηνοὺς, πρότερον οὐδὲν τὸ παράπαν ἡδικηκότας, δόλῳ τε περιελθὼν καὶ τρόπῳ ἀπολέσας τῷ εἰρημένῳ, ἐπειδὴ γυναῖκα κοσμίαν τε καὶ οὐκ ἀφανῆ ἀλίσκομένης τῆς πόλεως εἶδεν ἐκ χειρὸς μὲν τῆς ἀριστερᾶς πρὸς τοῦ τῶν βαρβάρων ἔλκομένην ξὺν πολλῇ βίᾳ, παιδίον δέ, ὅπερ αὐτῇ ἄρτι τοῦ τιτθοῦ ἦν ἀπαλλαγέν, ἀφείναι μὲν οὐ βουλομένην, ἔλκουσαν δὲ θάτερα χεῖρὶ ἐμπεπτωκὸς εἰς τὸ ἔδαφος, ἐπεὶ οἱ ξυντρέχειν οὐχ οἶόν τε ἦν τοῦτον δὴ τὸν βίαιον δρόμον, τὸν οἰκεῖον κἀνταῦθα ἐνδεδεικτεῖ τρόπον. φασὶ γὰρ αὐτὸν στενάξαντα δῆθεν τῷ λόγῳ, δόκησιν τε ὥς εἶη δεδακρυμένος παρεχόμενον τοῖς τότε παροῦσιν ἄλλοις τε καὶ Ἀναστασίῳ τῷ πρεσβευτῇ, εὐξασθαι τὸν θεὸν τίσασθαι τὸν τῶν γεγονότων κακῶν αἴτιον. Ἰουστινιανὸν δὲ τὸν Ῥωμαίων αὐτοκράτορα παραδηλοῦν ἠθέλεν, ἐξεπιστάμενος ὅτι δὴ αὐτὸς αἰτιώτατος ἀπάντων εἶη.”

evident; he only feigns his tears and imitates a nonverbal expression of human compassion.

In the examples discussed above, a person's character manifests itself in their behavior; laughter and crying are not generally categorized as positive or negative but are supposed to enable the reader to identify with the Roman side—which includes the ability to appreciate the sincerity of some of the enemies. Dishonorable conduct, that can manifest itself (just like its opposite), *inter alia*, in laughter (or in crying), however is reprehensible.

When it comes to the function of laughter (and crying) in Procopius's *Bella*, it can be ascertained that they are not intentionally used as a stylistic device but rather as a—not necessarily self-conscious—evaluation of the author, which follows the moral standards of Roman society.

Chapter 2

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“Does God Really Laugh?” – Appropriate and Inappropriate Descriptions of God in Islamic Traditionalist Theology¹

This article is dedicated to Isaiah Goldfeld,
my mentor and friend

Introduction

The work *Ḥādī al-arwāḥ ilā bilād al-afrāḥ* (The Leader of the Souls to the Land of Joy; henceforth *Ḥādī al-arwāḥ*) by the Damascene theologian Ibn Qayyim al-Ğawziyyah (d. 1350) is neither funny nor entertaining. Indeed, a work of seventy chapters, meant to prepare the believers for the horrifying events that will occur on the Day of Resurrection, cannot be funny by any means. However, *Ḥādī al-arwāḥ* contains many references to laughter. In fact, the verb *ḍaḥika* (laugh) and its variants and

¹ Translations of Quranic verses in this article are taken from N. J. Dawood, *The Koran* (London: Penguin Books 2000, first published 1956), which is a fluent and readable, although quite inaccurate, translation. A. J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1998, first published in 1964) is an accurate translation written in an archaic language, but I had to use it a number of times. I translated all the other texts in the article from original Arabic sources, unless otherwise indicated. I am grateful to my friends and colleagues Walid Saleh, Jon Hoover, Almog Kasher, and Miriam Goldstein for their helpful suggestions.

conjugations appear thirty times in *Hādī al-arwāh*; the laughter is mostly attributed to the Prophet Muḥammad, but also to God Himself.²

In *Hādī al-arwāh*, God's laughter is mentioned in a passage, which describes what will happen after the great trial, in which God will determine who inhabits Hell and who inhabits Heaven. The believers, of course, will be rewarded for the good deeds they performed in this world by being permitted to enter Heaven. They will be assembled in a sweet-smelling valley, in which they will see numerous pulpits made of light, pearl, emerald, gold, and silver. Suddenly, a great light will strike them. Lifting up their heads, they will actually see God, looking down at them. "O, inhabitants of Heaven, peace be with you!" — God will welcome them. They will reply: "Our Lord, You are peace, and peace comes from you. Bless you, Your Majesty, the Most Honorable!" And God shall be revealed to them laughing (*yadhaku*).³ In this passage, then, God's laughter is connected to the highest reward possible for the believers: the ability to see God's face. However, the text gives no hint as to the meaning of this laughter. One can safely assume, then, that as a reward for the inhabitants of Heaven, God's laughter is a benevolent laughter, meant to welcome the newcomers.

Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyyah did not draw the concept of God laughing from his vivid imagination. In fact, the description of this future event, in which the believers will witness God's face and hear His laughter, is based on several *ḥadīths*, which Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyyah merely paraphrased. As an ultra-traditionalist scholar, he constructed *Hādī al-arwāh* mainly on the Quran and the seventh century orally-transmitted material, which is attributed to the Prophet and his Companions. This material, in the form of thousands of anecdotes, is the Hadith literature, which is consensually regarded almost as holy as the Quran.⁴ In the

² Abū 'Abdallāh Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr ibn Ayyūb Šams al-Dīn ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyyah, *Hādī al-arwāh ilā bilād al-afrāh*, ed. Ḥamid Aḥmad al-Tāhir (Cairo: Dār al-Fağr li-l-Turāt, 2003).

³ Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyyah, *Hādī al-arwāh*, 307–08.

⁴ Following John Burton's observation, I use "Hadith" (with a capital H) in this article to denote the massive literature of tradition, assembled from thousands of text-units called *ḥadīths* (with a small letter). Because "Hadith" is more or less known in English, it is not accurately transliterated; nevertheless the technical term *ḥadīth*, is. John Burton, *An Introduction to the Hadith* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), ix. The most concise and clear explanation on the Hadith literature, its authenticity and the major approaches to this literature in western scholarship, is the introduction to: Gautier H. A. Juynboll, *The Authenticity of the Tradition Literature: Discussions in Modern Egypt* (Leiden: Brill 1969), 1–9. Juynboll's definition of Hadith, which is based on primary sources, is as follows: "The tradition literature of Islam is that which comprises all the sayings, deeds and decisions of the Prophet Muḥammad, his silent approval of the behavior of his contemporaries, and descriptions of his person . . . At first the tradition was committed to memory and orally transmitted from generation to generation until, after the first century of the Hijra (that is, in the eighth and ninth centuries–L.H.), it came to be registered in written compilations." Juynboll, *The Authenticity of the Tradition Literature*, 4. There are many introductory sources on Hadith literature. The ones which form a good, challenging, reading are: John Burton, *An*

introduction to *Hādī al-arwāh*, Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyyah explains that the only way for the believers to prepare themselves for the Day of Resurrection, is by studying the Hadith material and drawing from it details on Heaven and the life in the Hereafter. That is what the believers did, so he claims, from the time of the Prophet Muḥammad onward. The same preparation was surely needed for his contemporaries, and that was why Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyyah decided to assemble the material, which was scattered in various Hadith compilations, organize it, and make it accessible to the readers of the fourteenth century. The spiritual and indeed practical benefits of the Hadith material, on which *Hādī al-arwāh* is based, are further elaborated in the introduction:

When [the believers], who are led to success [by God], will know the Divine wisdom and volition which motivated their creation, they will lift up their heads. They will then realize that the knowledge about Heaven was transmitted to them through an unbroken chain of transmitters that goes back to the Prophet himself. And so they will get ready for what is to come. They will safely march on the Straight Path (*al-Ṣirāt al-Mustaqīm*) leading to Heaven.⁵

The teachings of the Prophet, transmitted through an unbroken chain of transmitters throughout the ages and recorded in the Hadith literature are the exclusive source for *Hādī al-arwāh*. Indeed, the Hadith is the only source for the few accounts describing God's laughter.⁶ The Hadith literature is also the only source for accounts describing the Prophet's laughter, also generously quoted in *Hādī al-arwāh*. The "laughter" *hadīths* quoted in *Hādī al-arwāh* are intended to record the Prophet's teachings about the Day of Resurrection, occasionally giving some

Introduction to the Hadith, 17–35; Muhammad Zubayr Siddiqi, *Hadith Literature: Its Origins, Development and Special Features*, 2nd revised ed. by Abdul Hakim Murad (1961; Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 1993), 1–9, 76–89.

⁵ Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyyah, *Hādī al-arwāh*, 12. The *Ṣirāt* is "a bridge extended over the midst of Hell, sharper than a sword, and thinner than hair, over which the creatures will pass." Edward Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon-Book 1*, photo-offset of the edition printed in London (1863–1893; Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 1968), 4:1678. The phrase *al-Ṣirāt al-Mustaqīm* appears in the opening chapter (*sūrat al-fātiḥah*) of the Quran, as a metaphor to the Islamic creed, faith and conduct. "You alone we worship, and You alone we turn for help. Guide us to the straight path" (Q. 1:5–6).

⁶ God's laughter is not mentioned in the Quran. God is mentioned in the Quran as the Creator of laughter, in a passage which correlates laughter with joy ("It is He who moves men to laughter and to tears." Q. 53:43). See a discussion in: Georges Tamer, "The Qur'ān and Humor," *Humor in der arabischen Kultur – Humor in Arabic Culture*, ed. Georges Tamer (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2009), 3–28; here 7–8. Tamer discusses God's mockery of the enemies of the Islamic community at 17–20. A concise discussion on laughter in the Quran is: Ludwig Amman, "Laughter," *The Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Leiden: Brill, 2001–2006), 3 (2003): 146–49 (also available in an online version at: <http://brill.nl/default.aspx?partid=227&pid=23761>; last accessed on Jan. 30, 2010). One of Amman's interesting observations is that the verb *d-h-k* and its derivatives appear in the Quran only ten times, while the Hebrew equivalents *s-h-q* and *ṣ-h-q* appear 179 times in the Hebrew Bible.

details about the circumstances in which the Prophet conveyed his teachings. Each *ḥadīṭ* was transmitted by either the actual participants in the events, or merely by eye-witnesses to these events.

One such example is the following, transmitted by Abū Bakr (d. 634), the Prophet's closest Companion and the first Islamic Caliph (*ḥalīfah*):

Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq [literally: Abū Bakr the honest] told [the following]: One morning, the Messenger of God woke up and prayed the Morning Prayer. He then sat [for a long time]. In the fore-noon he suddenly started to laugh [until noon]. He continued sitting where he was, and prayed the Noon Prayer, the Mid-Afternoon Prayer, and the Sunset Prayer. During all that time, he did not say a word [beside the words of the prayers], until he prayed the last prayer, which is the Evening Prayer. Then he retired to his family. The people, who were astonished by the Prophet's peculiar conduct, asked Abū Bakr to inquire what this conduct meant. Abū Bakr asked the Prophet, who willingly unfolded the detailed vision that was revealed to him during that long sitting.⁷ What the Prophet saw in his vision was the Day of Resurrection, when all the people were gathered in one plain. While waiting, and obviously worried about their fate, the people asked each of the Quranic prophets (Adam, Noah, Abraham, and Moses) to be their intercessor in the Big Trial, but each prophet refused in his turn, and sent them to the prophet who succeeded him. The people finally went and asked for Jesus' help. They found Jesus busy attending the sick and the lepers, arousing the dead and bringing them back to life. Jesus also refused to serve as an intercessor, and sent them to Muḥammad, to whom he referred as "The Lord of the Descendants of Adam" (*sayyid wuld Ādām*). Muḥammad then assembled a group of virtuous people, the martyrs (*ṣahīd*, pl. *ṣuhadā'*) included, and they interceded for the people, who were waiting for their sentence. After the intercession was completed, God gave Muḥammad and the group of virtuous people the opportunity to put in a good word for the sinners, who were destined to be in Hell: "And so they found a man in Hell, and they asked him: 'Have you ever done a good deed?' He replied: 'No, the only thing I can think of is that I ordered my children to burn my body in fire, when I die, then grind the remains until I become a fine powder, like kohl, and then take me to the beach and scatter me. That way, the Lord of all Beings will not have any power over me.' God asked: 'Why did you do that?' The man replied: 'Because I fear You.' For that God responded: 'Before you are all the possessions of the most powerful king in the world. This is what you shall have, and ten times more.' The man responded: 'Are you making fun of me? You are this king!'" Muḥammad concluded this story to Abū Bakr by saying: "Because of this man, I was laughing from fore-noon [until noon]."⁸

⁷ The vision was told by the Prophet in the past tense, as if the events already occurred. In a way, they did.

⁸ Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyyah, *Hādī al-arwāḥ*, 321–22. The *ḥadīṭ* appears in a Hadith compilation of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal (d. 855), the eponym of the Ḥanbalī school, and this was the source from which Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyyah quoted. Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad*, ed. Aḥmad Muḥammad Ṣākir (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīṭ, 1995), 1:172–75, *ḥadīṭ* no. 15. Because the text is very long, the above version combines accurate translation with paraphrasing. The parts of the text, which

Again, as in the above quoted *ḥadīth* on God's laughter, the text does not explain the meaning of the Prophet's laughter. Is it because the text is meant for the believers to reflect on the meaning of the Prophet's laughter, or is it because the meaning of this laughter is obvious to its recipients? A combination of these two questions probably leads us to the right answer. The immediate lesson of this anecdote, which was at least coherent for its initial recipients, is that a great sinner or heretic can be, at the bottom of his heart, a believer, because he fears God and recognizes His sovereignty. Still, the text indeed leads us to reflect on the meaning of the Prophet's laughter. Does the laughter indicate compassion for the man? Does the laughter express astonishment and enjoyment from this sinner's belief? Or else, can the Prophet's laughter signify mockery, perhaps from this sinner's stupidity, having believed that he can escape God's wrath by scattering his ashes in the sea? The text in question does not provide any answer to these questions. In order to comprehend the meaning of the Prophet's laughter in this and in other parallel texts from the Hadith, a close, comparative reading is required. This reading is needed also in order to shed light on God's laughter, as described in the Hadith.

This article, then, aims at examining the meaning of God's laughter on the Day of Resurrection in a cluster of *ḥadīths* quoted in the aphorisms and treatises of prominent traditionalist scholars from the ninth until the fourteenth centuries. The traditionalists, whose works I refer to in this article, are mainly from the Ḥanbalī and the Aṣ'arī schools.⁹ I will examine the Hadith material on God's laughter on several levels.

The laughter-*ḥadīths* present direct contact between God and the believers, but also between God and the infidels. God is revealed to the believers, laughing, but He also laughs at the infidels. Through an examination of the relevant Hadith material and the discussions of the traditionalists on this material, another issue emerges: the Prophet's laughter. Like all Hadith material, the *ḥadīths* on God's laughter were first and foremost oral texts, transmitted from master to disciples throughout the generations. The first master was, of course, the Prophet. In several recorded texts, we can track down valuable and rare remarks on the way this material was transmitted, meaning the gestures and tone of voice of the *muḥaddith* (the transmitter of *ḥadīths*). Was the Prophet laughing when describing God's laughter? Did the *muḥaddith* laugh while reciting the *ḥadīths* on God's laughter to his disciples?

are accurate translations, are marked by quotation marks.

⁹ The Ḥanbalīs were considered ultra-traditionalists, whereas the Aṣ'arīs were traditionalists with strong rationalistic traits. However, there were Ḥanbalīs who used rationalistic argumentations. The most coherent explanation of this issue is by William Montgomery Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1973), 180–82, 291–97, 317–18.

Did this laughter call for a comparison between human and divine laughter? These questions, to the best of my knowledge, have not been discussed in the modern research.

The main theological and ethical problem, which evolved from these texts, was the propriety and impropriety of attributing laughter both to God and the Prophet. The various hermeneutical approaches of the traditionalists to these texts begin with a literal reading and end with a figurative reading. There was also an attempt to read these texts literally, without getting caught in the dangerous pitfall of comparing God to man. It is noteworthy, that the Islamic faith adheres to the concept of a transcendent God, who is different from all existing things. In fact, a Quranic verse which states: "Nothing can be compared with Him" (Q. 42: 11), engendered a prohibition to compare God to His creation.

The inner-polemic which evolved around these texts within Islamic traditionalism also sheds light on the way these texts were read and understood. This raises two questions: Can laughter be defined as one of God's attributes, like His mercy, wisdom, and omnipotence? If the texts describing God's laughter are accepted, should the concept of God's laughter be a part of the Islamic creed? The various approaches of prominent traditionalist scholars towards these *ḥadīths* are also discussed here. The shift in the traditionalist mainstream view moved from a total acceptance of the texts to admitting their problematics and again to accepting them. This shift will be demonstrated through the views of the leading traditionalists Abū Ya'la (d. 1066), Ibn al-Ğawzī (d. 1201), Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 1328), and Ibn Qayyim al-Ğawziyyah. Their views reflect the diversity of nuanced approaches to these problematic texts within Islamic traditionalism.

Laughter in Eschatological Texts

In the Quran there is a passage that describes the believers laughing at the unbelievers. Their laughter, which was preceded by the laughter of the unbelievers, indicates mockery:

The evil-doers mock the faithful and wink at one another as they pass by them. When they meet their own folk they speak of them with jests, and when they see them, they say: 'These are surely erring men!' Yet they were not sent to be their guardians. But on that day the faithful will mock the unbelievers as they recline upon their couches and gaze around them. (Q. 83: 29–36)¹⁰

¹⁰ I did not want to alter N. J. Dawood's beautiful translation, but for the sake of accuracy, the text indeed indicates that both the evil-doers and the faithful laugh (*yadhakūn*), rather than mock.

In his discussion of this passage, Georges Tamer remarks that the evil-doers' laughter is sinful, while the believers' laughter is "an expression of their triumph."¹¹ This laughter, which will be expressed only on the Day of Judgment, is one of the benefits promised to the believers. "The community of believers plagued in the present time should be comforted by the vision of the eschatological humor guaranteed them in the future."¹² Indeed, the same aura of superiority, triumph, haughtiness, and gloat is maintained in the *ḥadīths*, which describe God laughing at the infidels and sinners.

As stated above, the few *ḥadīths* describing God's laughter are part of the Prophet's teachings on the Day of Resurrection, and they are scattered in various Hadith compilations. The tenth-century traditionalist theologian Abū Bakr al-Āğurrī (d. 971) assembled the eschatological Hadith material in two treatises.¹³ The *ḥadīths* quoted by al-Āğurrī record the dialogues that the Prophet conducted with his Companions (*al-ṣaḥābah*). The material was transmitted by the Companions themselves, who were either eye-witnesses or actual participants in the described dialogues.

Abū Razīn al-'Uqaylī (death date unknown), a Companion of the Prophet, reported:

I asked the Prophet one day: "Will each and every one of us see our Lord on the Day of Resurrection? Is there a sign for this in the creation?" The Prophet answered: "Abū Razīn, the fact that each and every one of you sees the moon is in itself a sign for this, is it not?" I replied: "Of course." The Prophet said: "So, God is the greatest."¹⁴

Hence, seeing God's face is part of the believers' reward in Heaven. Al-Āğurrī understood the following dialogue between the Prophet and Abū Razīn as connected to the reward of the believers, although the text does not explicitly state that it is so. Again, Abū Razīn himself describes the dialogue:

The Prophet said: "Our Lord will laugh because of His servants' despair, and because He knows that the time for Him to change things is near." I asked: "Oh, Messenger of

¹¹ Tamer, "The Qur'ān and Humor," 9.

¹² Tamer, "The Qur'ān and Humor," 9.

¹³ The long treatise is: Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥusayn ibn 'Abdallāh al-Āğurrī, *Kitāb al-ṣarī'ah* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Rayyān, 2000). The short one is: Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥusayn ibn 'Abdallāh al-Āğurrī, *Kitāb al-taṣḍīq bi-l-naẓar ilā Allāh ta'ālā fi al-āhirah*, ed. Muḥammad Ġayyāt al-Ğunbāz (Riyadh: Dār 'Ālam al-Kutub li-l-Naṣr wa-l-Tawzī', 1986).

¹⁴ Al-Āğurrī, *Kitāb al-taṣḍīq*, 73–74. This tradition is also quoted in: Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn Ishāq ibn Ḥuzaymah, *Kitāb al-tawḥīd wa-itbāt ṣifāt al-rabb izzā wa-ğalla*, ed. 'Abd al-'Azīz ibn Ibrāhīm al-Šahwān (Riyadh: Dār al-Ruṣd li-l-Naṣr wa-l-Tawzī', 1997), 179; Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, 12:481, *ḥadīth* no. 16130.

God! Does God really laugh?" The Prophet answered in the affirmative. I said: "A Lord (*rabb*) who laughs benevolently shall never deprive us of His bounty."¹⁵

A more prominent Companion, Abū Mūsà al-Ash'arī (d. ca. 662) transmitted two archetypes of *ḥadīths* on God's laughter: the good-natured, loving laughter, and the mocking one. The good-natured laughter is mentioned in a quotation from the Prophet:

The Prophet said: "On the Day of Resurrection our Lord, to Him belong glory and greatness, shall be revealed to us, laughing (*yataḡallà dāḥikan*)."¹⁶

In a slightly more detailed version, Abū Mūsà leads us to an explanation of the reason for God's laughter:

The Prophet said: "On the Day of Resurrection our Lord, to Him belong glory and greatness, shall be revealed to us, laughing (*yataḡallà dāḥikan*). And He will say: 'Rejoice, you Muslims! For I have replaced each one of you destined to go to Hell with a Jew or a Muslim'. "¹⁷

The good-natured laughter of God suddenly seems to be very intimidating, not to the Muslims, of course, but to the heretics. It may be even interpreted as an expression of superiority.

The Companions Abū Sa'īd al-Hudrī (d. ca. 685) and 'Abdallāh ibn Mas'ūd (d. ca. 652) transmitted a detailed account about the people who will be blessed by hearing God's laughter:

The Prophet said: "God will laugh in the presence of two men. One of the two will be a man who used to get up in the middle of the night, while everyone was asleep, to perform ablution and pray all night. The other man will fight the enemy, after his fellowmen were defeated, but he will keep on fighting, until God will grant him with the martyrdom (*ṣahādah*)."¹⁸

¹⁵ Al-Āḡurrī, *Kitāb al-taṣdīq*, 109; al-Āḡurrī, *Kitāb al-ṣarī'ah*, 294–95, *ḥadīth* no. 638 and no. 639; Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad*, 12:481, *ḥadīth* no. 16131. This *ḥadīth* is considered weak not because of its content, but because of its chain of transmitters.

¹⁶ Al-Āḡurrī, *Kitāb al-ṣarī'ah*, 295, *ḥadīth* no. 640.

¹⁷ Al-Āḡurrī, *Kitāb al-ṣarī'ah*, 295, *ḥadīth* no. 641; Al-Āḡurrī, *Kitāb al-taṣdīq*, 76.

¹⁸ Al-Āḡurrī, *Kitāb al-ṣarī'ah*, 294, *ḥadīth* no. 637. There is another version indicating that three groups of people will be rewarded with God's laughter: The ones who are praying in the middle of the night, the ones who stand in lines for prayer (basically, every Muslim who goes to the Friday Prayer in the mosque), and the ones who are positioned in lines on the battlefield. Al-Āḡurrī, *Kitāb al-ṣarī'ah*, 294, *ḥadīth* no. 636. There is also an explanatory *ḥadīth*: "A man came to the Prophet and asked: Who is the most preferable of all martyrs? The Prophet responded: Those who fight while staying in line, and never turn their faces until they are killed. Those will arrive at the highest of all the gardens, and your Lord, to Him belong might and glory, grant them with His laughter. If He grants a servant with His laughter, then [this servant] will not be judged for his actions [on the Day of Judgment]." Al-Āḡurrī, *Kitāb al-ṣarī'ah*, 299, *ḥadīth* no. 650. For another variant, see: Abū Bakr

Several Companions, among whom was the prominent Companion Abū Hurayrah (d. ca. 680), transmitted a different version:

The Prophet said: "God will laugh in the presence of two men: one of them killed the other, thereafter both arrived in Heaven. [How is that possible?] The first man fought for the cause of God, and killed the second man. Then God forgave the killer, and also made him fight for the cause of God and die as a martyr."¹⁹

God's laughter here is perceived as a reward granted to the believers who perform more good deeds than others: they either pray in an extraordinary way, or die as martyrs on the battlefield.²⁰

Laughter as an Illustration

The Hadith literature is based on numerous reports, transmitted orally from generation to generation.²¹ The traditional Muslim approach regards this literature as a faithful record of the Prophet's and his Companions' deeds, sayings, and teachings.²² The traditional Hadith theory roughly divides each text-unit or *ḥadīth* into an *isnād* (a chain of transmitters, which is meant to attest the credibility of the content) and a *matn* (the story itself). However, this division is not clear-cut, as the last link in the chain of transmitters, the narrator, is often the eye-witness to the event which he himself narrates, meaning he is also a part of the "story." The story itself can also be divided into several parts. For instance, the story can begin with a description of a situation, in which the Prophet did something, continue with a citation of the Prophet's sayings, and conclude with an exegetical comment of the narrator.²³

al-Bayhaqī (d. 1066), *Al-Asmā' wa-l-ṣifāt*, ed. 'Abd Allāh ibn Muḥammad al-Ḥāṣidī (Jeddah: Maktabat al-Sawādī li-l-Tawzī' 1993), 2: 408.

¹⁹ Al-Āḡurrī, *Kitāb al-ṣarī'ah*, 292–93 *ḥadīths* no. 629, 630, 631, 632, 633, 634; Al-Bayhaqī, *Al-Asmā' wa-l-ṣifāt*, 2: 401; Ibn Ḥuzaymah, *Kitāb al-tawḥīd*, 569–70.

²⁰ See also a *ḥadīth* stating that, "God laughs because of the despair of his servants." According to John Renard, in this *ḥadīth*, God is "amused at humanity's insecurity about something so infinitely certain as divine mercy." John Renard, "Despair," *The Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, 1(2001):521–22.

²¹ The definition of Hadith literature as an oral literature is inaccurate, since from early days, the *muḥaddiths* kept records of the material they were entrusted with, and often they read the material out loud to their students. Gregor Schoeler suggests "to avoid such catchphrases as 'written transmission' versus 'oral transmission' and talk about lecture and teaching practices in early Islam." Gregor Schoeler, "The Transmission of the Sciences in Early Islam- Oral or Written?," in: Gregor Schoeler, *The Oral and the Written in Early Islam*, tr. Uwe Vagelpohl and ed. James E. Montgomery (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 28–44; here 41.

²² Siddiqi, *Ḥadīth Literature*, 13–14.

²³ Cf. R. Marston Speight's division into: 1) the chain of transmission; 2) the introduction, or

Even after the *ḥadīṭs* were recorded and compiled, they retained their characteristic as an oral literature. G. H. A. Junyboll determines: "The force of the spoken word has always been great with the Arabs, as it was with the Jews. Note, for example, the important position the poet held in pre-Islamic tribal society because of the force of his poetry. To this, one may add that the Arabs are extremely fond of story-telling; in the earliest days the *quṣṣās* (story-tellers – L.H.) already enjoyed public favor. It is no wonder that traditions acquired a wide popularity with the masses."²⁴ The popularity of the *ḥadīṭs*, then, almost stood in contrast to their sacredness.

There were several attempts to investigate the narrative elements of *ḥadīṭs*. One such commendable attempt is an important article by Sebastian Günther, which bases its analysis of several *ḥadīṭs* on theoretical premises. Günther explains that he considers the individual *ḥadīṭ* "as a textual entity," and elaborates further: "In order to figure out, firstly, its possible narrativity, all aspects, characteristics and intertwined processes of its narration may be understood within the framework of a 'narrative complex' (in Germ. *Erzählkomplex*). The latter is made up of three basic elements: (A) the narrative act realized in a narrative situation (in short: the process of narrating); (B) The 'narrative text' or narrative discourse, i.e. the substantially existing or present text, the realization of a story as text, the *how* is being narrated (Fr. *signifiant*), or the shaping of a story by its narrator. (C) The 'story' (Germ. *Die eigentliche Geschichte*; Fr. *signifié, histoire*), i.e., the content of the text, or the connection of the events narrated according to their chronological order."²⁵ Günther describes the narrator's (the *muḥaddith*) tactics and positions as reflected in the text, and he particularly notices when the narrator assumes "the platform of an alleged reporter or eye-witness," and when he deserts this platform.²⁶

Although Günther elaborates on the technical aspects of transmitting oral literature,²⁷ he neglects a feature which no doubt accompanied the transmission of *ḥadīṭs*, and that is the transmitter's tone of voice, facial expressions, and body gestures. This neglect was probably dictated by the content of the specific *ḥadīṭs*, which served as the case-studies for Günther's article. The texts that he examined do not contain any indication of any of these rhetorical features. However, as we will see, these features were sometimes recorded. No doubt that the transmitters

setting; 3) the report itself. R. Marston Speight, "Oral Traditions of the Prophet Muḥammad: A Formulaic Approach," *Oral Tradition*, 4.1–2 (1989): 27–37; here 28.

²⁴ Junyboll, *The Authenticity*, 9.

²⁵ Sebastian Günther, "Fictional Narration and Imagination within an Authoritative Framework-Towards a New Understanding of Ḥadīth," *Story-Telling in the Framework of Non-Fictional Arabic Literature*, ed. Stefan Leder (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1998), 433–71; here 437.

²⁶ Günther, "Fictional Narration," 447.

²⁷ Günther, "Fictional Narration," 463–71.

of the *ḥadīths* used these rhetorical devices to enhance the messages conveyed in the texts.

That hand gestures, facial expressions, and tone of voice were an inseparable part of the transmitting process of the Hadith material seems to be an axiom which needs no proofs. Hand gestures are an inseparable part of the phenomenon of human communication, as Michael Argyle observes: "While people speak they make a number of bodily movements, especially with their hands. Many of these are 'batons', i.e. movements giving emphasis Many gestures are 'illustrations' of the verbal contents: they copy shapes, objects or movements, or have metaphorical meaning" ²⁸ From the three categories of gestures that Argyle enumerates in his book, it seems that "illustrators" are the most relevant to our discussion: "'Illustrators' are 'movements which are directly tied to speech, serving to illustrate what is being said verbally'." ²⁹

That speech and illustrators are inseparable is an observation which the ninth century rationalist scholar from Basra, Iraq, al-Ġāḥiẓ (d. ca. 868) already made. In his words: "Gesture and speech are partners." ³⁰ According to al-Ġāḥiẓ, man uses five methods to indicate what he means, or to express his thoughts: speech, gesture (*iṣārah*, pl. *iṣārāt*), counting on fingers or knuckles, writing, and posture or attitude. ³¹ The gesture, according to him, is performed "by a hand, head, eye, eyebrows, or knees, when two people draw apart. [The gesture can be performed] by a garment and a sword." ³² Al-Ġāḥiẓ observes, and continues: "The gesture of the gaze, the eyebrows, and other bodily parts, can be of great help when people try to conceal things from one another. If it wasn't for the gesture, people would not be able to understand subtleties, and they would be quite ignorant about that

²⁸ Michael Argyle, *Bodily Communication*, 2nd edition (1975; London and New York: Methuen and Co. 1988), 107.

²⁹ Argyle, *Bodily Communication*, 188, quoting P. Ekman and W. V. Friesen, "The Repertoire of Nonverbal Behavior: Categories, Origins, Usage and Coding," *Semiotica* 1(1969): 49–67. For an elaboration on illustrators, see: Argyle, *Bodily Communication*, 194–97.

³⁰ Abū 'Uṭmān 'Amr ibn Baḥr al-Fuqaymī al-Baṣrī al-Ġāḥiẓ, *Al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn*, ed. 'Abd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn (Cairo: Maktabat al-Hāngī 1418/1998), 1:78.

³¹ Al-Ġāḥiẓ, *Al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn*, 1:76. Al-Ġāḥiẓ's observations, as well as the observation of his successors, are elaborated in: G. E. von Grunebaum, "Bayān," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*. Second Edition, ed. P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C. E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel and W. P. Heinrichs (Leiden: Brill, 1960–2000), 1 (1968), 1114–16. Also available in Brill Online; Ed(s). "Ishāra." *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition, 4 (1978), 113–14. I have found a striking resemblance between al-Ġāḥiẓ's observations and those of European theorists of the Middle Ages, just from reading the following two sources: Harry Caplan, "Classical Rhetoric and the Mediaeval Theory of Preaching," *Classical Philology* 28.2 (Apr. 1933): 76–96; here 74, 92–93; J. A. Burrow, *Gestures and Looks in Medieval Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 69–80.

³² Al-Ġāḥiẓ, *Al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn*, 1:78.

altogether.”³³ Although al-Ġāhiz refers to the eloquent speech, his words seem to be applicable to all kinds of speech, more so concerning the transmitting of *ḥadīths*. From the Hadith material itself, but also from works on *uṣūl al-fiqh* (defining the principles of Islamic jurisprudence), it is quite obvious that the traditionalists were aware of a whole bulk of messages and meanings, which could not be conveyed by words. The twelfth century Aṣʿarī theologian Abū Hāmid al-Ġazālī (d. 1111, known in the Medieval west as Algazel) stated: “clarifying the meaning of something can be realized through terminological phrases, but it can also be realized through actions, gestures and symbols, because these are also indicators and clarifiers.”³⁴ Al-Ġazālī called the actions, gestures, or symbols accompanying someone’s words as *qarāʾin*, i.e., conjunctions or annexations. He emphasized that these annexations should be passed on by the transmitters of the texts exactly as they occurred: “As for the gestures, symbols, movements, introductions, and conclusions – all these should not be subjected to exhaustive narrative or to guesses and conjectures. Only an eye-witness can pass it on. Therefore, the Prophet’s Companions who witnessed such an event passed it to their disciples using the most coherent words, or using the annexations on which we elaborated before A thing [or a case] which cannot be uttered in words, should be expressed by those annexations.”³⁵

Al-Ġazālī’s approach represents the total trust and credibility which the traditionalists had for the *muḥadditūn*, the transmitters of the *ḥadīths*. The traditionalists deemed that the *muḥadditūn* treat the material entrusted to them with great care and caution. Because Hadith material was the basis for Islamic jurisprudence, the accuracy of its content was carefully maintained, by conveying every piece of relevant information, including the gestures of the transmitters of the texts. However, as al-Ġazālī admits later, the use of gestures does not necessarily entail an understanding of the uttered words. Sometimes an additional explanation or interpretation is required.³⁶ What al-Ġazālī defines as “annexations” is not necessarily “illustrators,” taking Argyle’s definition, as al-Ġazālī’s definition includes verbal explanations and not just body gestures and facial expressions. Still, al-Ġazālī’s description illuminates the place of body gestures and facial expressions in the process of transmitting the *ḥadīths*.

³³ Al-Ġāhiz, *Al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn*, 1:78.

³⁴ Abū Hāmid Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ġazālī, *Al-Mustasfā min ʿilm al-uṣūl*, 4 vols., ed. Ḥamzah ibn Zuhayr Ḥāfiz, (n.p, n.d.), 3:63. The second part of this sentence is quoted in Sherman A. Jackson, “From Prophetic Actions to Constitutional Theory: A Novel Chapter in Medieval Muslim Jurisprudence,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 25. 1 (Nov. 1993): 71–90; here 88, note 28.

³⁵ Al-Ġazālī, *Al-Mustasfā*, 3:30–31.

³⁶ Al-Ġazālī, *Al-Mustasfā*, 3:63.

There were only a few, undeveloped attempts—some dating back to the beginning of the twentieth century—that addressed the existence of gestures in the Hadith discourse.³⁷ The most recent observations were made by R. Marston Speight in an article on the variant readings of *ḥadīṭ*s: "It seems likely that transmitters of *ḥadīṭ* were motivated by a concern to clothe the prophetic dicta in effective rhetorical dress to enhance their religious significance. In doing so they participated in the age-old Middle Eastern literary and rhetorical tradition of preserving in carefully crafted, concise texts, either oral or written, the sayings and actions of famous people."³⁸ Speight concludes, "that transmitters exercised a degree of literary and rhetorical creativeness in their narration of the *aḥādīth* (plural form of *ḥadīṭ* — L.H.) of which they were the receivers and custodians."³⁹ Still, he refers solely to the narrative-germ of the *ḥadīṭ*, i.e. the part which Günther defines as "the story," and does not address the body gestures of the *muḥadditūn*. In another important article, Speight enumerates the signs of oral transmission, which are easily traceable in the Hadith literature: "unvarying style, frequent repetition of expressions, emphasis upon action rather than description, conversational tone, atomistic structure, and, above all, the use of formulas as 'the means of expressing the themes' . . ."⁴⁰ In this article Speight also refers only to narrative formulas, and does not address other non-verbal features of the transmission.

³⁷ The author of the entry "Ishāra" in the second edition of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, draws our attention to the observations of the great scholar Ignaz Goldziher (d. 1921) on the ritual and symbolic gestures of the Arabs, gestures which go back to remote antiquity. Goldziher indeed noticed the records in the Hadith literature on the use the Prophet made with his index finger (*sabbābah*) during prayer. G. H. Bousquet, "Études islamologiques d'Ignaz Goldziher," *Arabica* 7.1 (1960): 1–29; here 22–23. Apart from that, Goldziher was also interested in the gesture of affirmation among the Arabs. His views were attacked in a brief article, whose author also quotes from undisclosed Arabic sources. S. S. George, "The Gesture of Affirmation among the Arabs," *The American Journal of Psychology* 27.3 (July 1916): 320–23. S. S. George also attacked William Wundt, "the father of experimental psychology," for relying on Goldziher's observations. Indeed, there are lengthy quotations from Goldziher in Wundt's work; at least in the small portion of it, which was translated into English. For example, Wundt states, quoting Goldziher: "There are many similar traditions of highly developed systems of sign languages on our planet. Here, particularly, the East offers us a field for observation. Among Islamic Arabs, gestural expression seems to have been a much-used aid to speech, recognized by the philosophers of that people not only as a means to assure understanding, but also as a sentient interpretation of the spoken word (the Prophet himself preferring it)." Wilhelm Wundt, *The Language of Gestures* (The Hague and Paris: Mouton, 1973), 66. See other quotations from Goldziher, *ibid.*, 92.

³⁸ R. Marston Speight, "A Look at Variant Readings in the Ḥadīth," *Der Islam* 77(2000): 169–79; here 175.

³⁹ Speight, "A Look at Variant Readings," 177.

⁴⁰ R. Marston Speight, "Oral Traditions," 27.

Nevertheless, “the story” and “the narrator’s platform” in one *ḥadīṭ* or text-unit, sometimes contain information on the indicators or illustrators accompanying the Prophetic dicta. Surprisingly enough, it is the anthropomorphic Hadith material that retains indications of bodily gestures, that were used first by the Prophet and then by the transmitters of the material.⁴¹

The following *ḥadīṭ* is cited in several variations in *Kitāb al-tawḥīd* (The Book of God’s Unity) by Ibn Ḥuzaymah (d. 924). The *ḥadīṭ* is transmitted on the authority of [ʿAbdallāh] ibn ʿUmar, (d. 693; ʿAbdallāh was a Companion of the Prophet, and also the son of ʿUmar, the second Caliph of Islam), and the text records his testimony to an event he witnessed:

One day, the Messenger of God recited the following Quranic verse, while standing on the pulpit: “But on the Day of Resurrection He will hold the entire earth in His grasp and fold up the heavens in His right hand.” (Q. 39:67). The Messenger of God said: “He will move His fingers like so (*hā-kadā*). Then God will praise Himself and say: ‘I am the most proud, the king, I am the most powerful and generous.’ ” The pulpit started to shake under the feet of the Messenger of God, until we cried in panic: “It will cause him to fall down!”⁴²

The expression “He moved his fingers like so (*hā-kadā*)” was a common rhetorical device, accompanied by a demonstration of the gesture. The gesture, I assume, was faithfully conducted by the transmitters of this tradition from generation to generation. Regrettably, the nature of this gesture is not elaborated in the text. The following example, also on the authority of ʿAbdallāh ibn ʿUmar, defined the gesture made by the Prophet more clearly:

Someone asked the Prophet on the *Dağğāl* (the Islamic equivalent of the anti-Christ). He replied: “God shall not be concealed from you. God is not one-eyed.” He pointed his eye with his hand, and continued: “The Messiah the *Dağğāl* does not have a right eye. His [left] eye looks like a floating grape.”⁴³

⁴¹ Several examples are quoted in: Livnat Holtzman, “Anthropomorphism,” *The Encyclopaedia of Islam, Third Edition*, eds. Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas and Everett Rowson (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming in 2010).

⁴² Ibn Ḥuzaymah, *Kitāb al-tawḥīd*, 171. For similar *ḥadīṭs*, see: *ibid*, 166–73. The *ḥadīṭ* also appears in: Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad* 5:59–60, 138, *ḥadīṭs* no. 5414, 5608.

⁴³ Ibn Ḥuzaymah, *Kitāb al-tawḥīd*, 114. The same *ḥadīṭ* appears in: Abū ʿAbdallāh Muḥammad ibn Ismāʿīl al-Buḥārī (d. 870), *Al-Ğāmi ʿal-ṣaḥīḥ*, eds. Muḥibb al-Dīn al-Ḥaṭīb et. al. (Cairo: al-Maktabah al-Salafiyyah, 1980), 4:385 (*Kitāb al-tawḥīd*, Bāb 17, *ḥadīṭ* 7407). For basic information on the *Dağğāl*, see: A. Abel, “al-Dadjdāl”, *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, 2 (1965), 76–77. According to classical dictionaries, an eye which looks like a floating grape is prominent and conspicuous. Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, 5:1861.

While reciting the last part of Q. 4:58 ("and God hears all and sees everything"), the Prophet put his thumb on his ear and his forefinger on his eye.⁴⁴ This case caused uneasiness among the later traditionalists. Ibn Taymiyyah, for instance, quotes this account while adding that by performing this gesture, the Prophet's intention was surely to affirm the Divine attributes of hearing and seeing, and not to compare the Creator with His creation.⁴⁵

The descriptions of the Prophet's laughter in the Hadith literature also fall into the category of gestures accompanying the texts. I will not consider the entire bulk of *ḥadīths* describing the Prophet's laughter in various occasions and contexts. These were meticulously treated by Ludwig Amman.⁴⁶ I will, however, consider here the texts in which the Prophet's laughter is an illustrator of God's laughter.

ʿAbdallāh ibn Masʿūd, the prominent Companion and Quran exegete, who taught Hadith in Kufa, Iraq, told his disciples a lengthy *ḥadīth* on God's meeting with the heretics and the believers on the Day of Resurrection. ʿAbdallāh of course heard this *ḥadīth* from the Prophet himself. This *ḥadīth* mentions God's laughter, but more so: from ʿAbdallāh ibn Masʿūd's version it is clear that the Prophet used to accompany this specific text with laughter. A repetitive *ḥadīth*, each of its parts can be discussed and glossed in depth. Hence, I have dissected it into parts, which are divided by necessary comments. Only the important parts will be translated, while the other parts will be paraphrased. This is what ʿAbdallāh transmitted:⁴⁷

The Messenger of God said: God will gather all the nations, and then He will descend from His throne (*ʿarṣ*) to His seat (*kursī*), which is as vast as the heavens and earth.⁴⁸ Then He will say to them: "Will you be pleased, if each nation is entrusted with what was entrusted to it in this world?" They will reply: "Yes." And so God, to Him belong might and glory, will say: "Is this an act of justice bestowed upon you by your Lord?" And they will answer: "Yes." And so, each nation will set out to the deity it used to worship, and various idols will then appear. An idol of the sun will be set for those

⁴⁴ Ibn Huzaymah, *Kitāb al-tawḥīd*, 97.

⁴⁵ Aḥmad ibn ʿAbd al-Halīm ibn Taymiyyah, *Šarḥ al-ʿuqūd al-isfahāniyyah*, ed. Saʿīd ibn Naṣr ibn Muḥammad (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Ruṣd, 2001), 136.

⁴⁶ Ludwig Amman, *Vorbild und Vernunft: Die Regelung von Lachen und Scherzen im mittelalterlichen Islam*. Arabistische Texte und Studien, 5 (Hildsheim, Zürich, and New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 1993), 39–109; here 42–69.

⁴⁷ There are a number of versions to this lengthy *ḥadīth*. I have translated and paraphrased the *ḥadīth* as it appears in the following sources: Al-Āḡurrī, *Kitāb al-taṣdīq*, 79–82; Abū al-Qāsim Sulaymān ibn Aḥmad al-Ṭabarānī (d. 971), *Al-Muʿḡam al-kabīr*, ed. Ḥamdī ʿAbd al-Maḡīd al-Salifī (Cairo: Maktabat Ibn Taymiyyah, 1984), 9: 416–21, *ḥadīth* no. 9763. I also consulted: Al-Bayhaqī, *Al-Asmāʾ wa-l-sifāt*, 2: 66–70, 413, *ḥadīths* no. 641, 989; Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyyah, *Hādī al-arwāḥ*, 328–31. A short version appears in Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, 4:5–6, *ḥadīth* no. 3714. An annotated translation of this *ḥadīth* appeared in: Daniel Gimaret, *Dieu à l'image de l'homme* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1997), 266–68.

⁴⁸ An allusion to Q. 2: 255: "His throne is as vast as the heavens and the earth."

who used to worship the sun. An idol of the moon will be set for those who used to worship the moon. An image of fire will be set for those who used to worship fire. Whoever worshiped another idol, shall receive his idol. Those who worshiped Jesus, shall receive an idol of Jesus. Those who worshiped Ezra [the Scribe] shall receive an idol of Ezra.⁴⁹ Suddenly they will hear a voice: "Each nation is required to follow the deity it worshiped in this world." And so they will be led to the Fire.⁵⁰

Then 'Abdallāh ibn Mas'ūd enters into a very lengthy description of the dialogue between the Muslims and God:

The nation of Muḥammad will remain. They will be asked: "What are you waiting for?" And they will reply: "We have a Lord, but we have not seen Him yet." "Would you recognize Him if you saw Him?" they will be asked by the same voice. And they will reply: "Yes, there is an agreed upon sign between us and Him." At that point, the leg shall be bared,⁵¹ and they will immediately prostrate for a very long time, all except a group of people who will remain on their buttocks like young calves.⁵²

Those who could not prostrate are obviously Muslim hypocrites or sinners, whose faith is only a façade. Unlike other idolaters of other nations, the Muslim hypocrites are doomed to humiliation, gradually revealed in this text. This humiliation is symbolized first by mentioning the buttocks of the Muslim hypocrites. As the story continues, their buttocks are mentioned again, in the course of the walk of all humans across the *Ṣirāt* (the bridge extended over Hell), a walk which 'Abdallāh's story describes in great detail. First, each Muslim will be given a lamp "which is in accordance with the amount of his good deeds": some will be given a lamp, as big and steady as a mountain. These Muslims will not have to carry the lamp, which "will run before them." Some will hold their lamps in their right hand (an indication that they are indeed the righteous), while others will carry their lamps on their toes. While walking, these unfortunate people will cause their lamps to extinguish and light up again. At this point, the sinners or hypocrites will be left behind, when a great wall will be erected to separate them from the believers.⁵³ The group that will be left behind, will cross the very narrow

⁴⁹ On the role of Ezra the Scribe in the Islamic polemic against the Bible, see Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds: Medieval Islam and Bible Criticism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 50–59, 60–74.

⁵⁰ Al-Āğurrī, *Kitāb al-taṣdīq*, 79–80; al-Ṭabarānī, *Al-Mu'ğam*, 9: 417.

⁵¹ The leg shall be bared is an allusion to Q. 68:42, which prophesizes the encounter between God and the non-believers on the Day of Resurrection: "Upon the day when the leg shall be bared, and they shall be summoned to bow themselves, but they cannot." Here I quote from Arberry's translation. Dawood evades the anthropomorphic description, and takes a figurative course: "On the day the dread event unfolds and they are told to prostrate themselves, they will not be able."

⁵² Al-Āğurrī, *Kitāb al-taṣdīq*, 80; al-Ṭabarānī, *Al-Mu'ğam*, 9: 418.

⁵³ This description is an allusion to Q. 57: 13: "A wall with a gate shall be set before them. Inside there shall be mercy, and without, to the fore, the scourge of Hell."

and slippery *Ṣirāt*. Apparently, this bridge will be as narrow as a blade of a sword. This amusing scene probably aroused laughs among its listeners:

They will cross the *Ṣirāt* in complete accordance with the way they acted in this world: some will cross the *Ṣirāt* as fast as the wind, while other will be as quick as the lightning. Some of them will be as fast as horses. However, some will crawl on their bottoms, so that at one point their legs will tumble and their hands will suspend [their fall], and at some other point their hands will tumble and their legs will suspend [their fall].⁵⁴

This humorous description reaches its peak when a ridiculous and unfortunate Muslim, who crawled on his bottom, arrives at the gates of Heaven. A lengthy dialogue is conducted between this Muslim and God. The Muslim pleads to enter into Heaven, so he will not see and hear “the whispering of the fire,” that is the voice of Hell. God lets him in, but sets the condition that this believer may not ask for anything more than entering Heaven. The believer promises, but as he enters Heaven, he wants to improve his position. First, he is given a place on a step near a tree, but as he realizes that there is a dream-house in an upper level of Heaven, he asks God to be placed in that house.

God will say: “But did you not swear to Me that you will not ask Me anything, but to enter this place?” The sinner will reply: “Please God, allow me to go to this level, and no more.” Of course, when he reaches the desired house, he asks for a better one. So God will let him in that house, while the man keeps his silence. God will then say: “What is the matter with you? Why don’t you ask me for something else?” The man will then reply: “My Lord, I have asked You and asked You, until I felt quite ashamed. I am also ashamed that I was not able to keep my promise.” God will reply: “Would you like me to give you as many riches as the size of the earth, since the day I created until the day I destroyed it, and ten times as much?” The man will reply: “Are you mocking me, You, who is the Glorious Lord?” And God will laugh when He hears what the man says.⁵⁵

According to his disciples, when ‘Abdallāh ibn Mas‘ūd concluded his words, he burst into laughter.⁵⁶ One of ‘Abdallāh ibn Mas‘ūd’s disciples elaborates on this laughter:

⁵⁴ Al-Āğurri, *Kitāb al-taṣḍīq*, 81. In al-Ṭabarānī’s version, the ridiculous appearance of the sinners is enhanced. This elaborate version is obviously meant to draw laughter from the audience: “Some will go over [the *Ṣirāt*] dragging their feet. The one, who will be given a lamp to carry on his toes, will crawl on his face. His hands and feet will fall [from the *Ṣirāt*] and dwindle, one at a time, so his body parts will be hurt by the fire. And so he will continue crawling, until he reaches [solid ground].” al-Ṭabarānī, *Al-Mu‘ğam*, 9: 418.

⁵⁵ Al-Āğurri, *Kitāb al-taṣḍīq*, 81; al-Ṭabarānī, *Al-Mu‘ğam*, 9: 419.

⁵⁶ Al-Ṭabarānī, *Al-Mu‘ğam*, 9: 419.

We realized that each time ‘Abdallāh ibn Mas‘ūd reached that point, he laughed until his last molar was revealed. We asked him: “You have told us this *ḥadīth* time and again, and every time you have reached this place, you laughed until your last molar was revealed.” Ibn Mas‘ūd responded: “I have witnessed the Prophet telling this *ḥadīth* time and again, and every time he reached this point, he laughed until his last molar was revealed.”⁵⁷

After this laughter episode, Ibn Mas‘ūd continued to relate the whereabouts of the sinner, who is finally led into a palace carved in a huge pearl, its walls covered with emeralds and rubies. In this palace, his virgin wife awaits him. Her skin is so fair, that the whiteness of her shanks and the redness of her veins are glowing through the seventy dresses that she wears.⁵⁸

In this slightly different version of this *ḥadīth*, there are more details about the laughter of ‘Abdallāh ibn Mas‘ūd:

Ibn Mas‘ūd laughed. He then asked [the disciples]: “Why don’t you ask me what am I laughing about?” They responded: “What made you laugh?” He said: “That is exactly what the Prophet did. [He told the *ḥadīth*] and then he laughed. Then he [i.e., the Prophet] asked: ‘Why don’t you ask me what am I laughing about?’ [Without waiting for our reply], he [i.e., the Prophet] continued: ‘I am laughing because God, to Him belong might and glory, laughed when [the sinner] asked: Are you mocking me? God responded: ‘I am not mocking you, but I am omnipotent.’ And He let the sinner enter Paradise.”⁵⁹

The Prophet’s laughter in this text, whose authenticity was attested by the traditionalists,⁶⁰ serves as an illustration of God’s laughter. The Prophet actually demonstrates the way God laughs. ‘Abdallāh ibn Mas‘ūd, in kind, demonstrates the Prophet’s laughter. From the context of the above *ḥadīth*, it is obvious that God’s laughter is a positive expression. God is pleased that the sinner at last recognized His omnipotence by calling Him “The Glorious God.” God, then, laughs as a sign of His satisfaction.

Still, ‘Abdallāh ibn Mas‘ūd’s text is a bit cryptic, and does not specifically state the meaning of God’s laughter. A different version of the *ḥadīth*, on the authority of Abū Hurayrah, adds a few words, which shed more light on the meaning of this laughter. The situation is slightly different: in this version, the sinner asks to enter Heaven, even though he promised God that he will ask for nothing, if God saves him from Hell:

⁵⁷ Al-Āğurrī, *Kitāb al-taṣdīq*, 82; al-Ṭabarānī, *Al-Mu‘jam*, 9: 419.

⁵⁸ Al-Āğurrī, *Kitāb al-taṣdīq*, 82, al-Ṭabarānī, *Al-Mu‘jam*, 9: 420.

⁵⁹ Al-Āğurrī, *Kitāb al-ṣarīḥ*, 298, *ḥadīth* 247.

⁶⁰ Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyyah says: “This is a great and good (*ḥasan*) *ḥadīth*, quoted in all the important Hadith compilations.” Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyyah, *Ḥādī al-arwāḥ*, 332.

He approached the gates of Heaven. When he saw what is inside, he kept quiet for a very long time. Then he said: “My Lord, let me enter Heaven.” God replied: “Did you not claim, not to have asked Me for anything else [if I save you from Hell]? Woe unto you, human being, what made you break your promise?” The man begged: “My Lord, do not make me the most miserable of the whole creatures You created.” He continued begging, until God laughed. Laughing in the man’s presence, He let him enter.⁶¹

The meaning of God’s laughter is, then, an expression of His mercy. Adopting this explanation, Ašʿarī scholars interpreted God’s laughter as a metaphor of God’s mercy. Still, the depiction of God laughing, no doubt lovingly, at the strayed sinner who repented, and the dialogue between the two, give the impression of God’s playfulness. No doubt God, the all-Knowing, knows the sinner’s actions in advance. However, He lets the sinner continue begging for His own amusement. Even so, the moral lesson dims the depiction of a playful God. The whole situation is meant to lead the sinner to the correct belief, which he must arrive through his own free will.

In another, more explicit text, the Prophet’s laughter serves again as an illustrator of God’s laughter. This time God’s laughter indicates astonishment, and not mercy:

The *muḥaddiṭ* ʿAlī ibn Rabīʿah al-Wālibī (death date unknown) told the following tale: “I was the rear man (*ridf*) riding the same camel as ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib (d. 661; Muhammad’s cousin and Companion, and the Fourth Caliph) when we arrived at the cemetery of Kufa (in Iraq). ʿAlī said: ‘There is no God but You, Praised be You. Please forgive my sins, because no one can forgive sins, but You.’ He then looked at me and laughed. I asked: ‘Oh, Commander of the Believers, You ask for God’s forgiveness and then you turn to me and laugh?’ He answered: ‘I was the rear man of the Prophet, when we rode in the stony tract of al-Ḥarrah [near Medina]. The Prophet then said: ‘There is no God but You, Praised be You. Please forgive my sins, because no one can forgive sins, but You.’ He then looked at the sky, then he turned to me and laughed. I asked him: ‘Oh, Messenger of God, You ask for God’s forgiveness and then you turn to me and laugh?’ And he answered: ‘I laughed because My Lord laughs, when He is astonished [to find out] that His slave knows that only God can forgive sins.’”⁶²

This “story within a story” is fascinating. The dialogue between the transmitter, ʿAlī ibn Rabīʿah al-Wālibī, and ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, is an accurate reflection of ʿAlī ibn

⁶¹ An interesting version of this text appears in Ibn Kaṭīr’s (d. 1373) work on eschatology. In this version, which is quoted from al-Buhārī, the sinner continued pleading God, “until God laughed, and while laughing He let the man into Heaven.” Muḥammad ibn Ismāʿīl Abū al-Fidaʾ Ibn Kaṭīr, *Al-Nihāyah fī al-fitan wa-l-malāhim* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1991), 261–62. See also: al-Buhārī, *al-Ġāmiʿ al-ṣaḥīḥ*, 4: 204 (*Kitāb al-riqāq*, Bāb 52, *ḥadīṭ* 6573), 4: 390–91 (*Kitāb al-tawḥīd*, Bāb 24, *ḥadīṭ* 7437).

⁶² Al-Ġurūrī, *Kitāb al-ṣarīʾah*, 295–96, *ḥadīṭ* 642. For other variations, see: Ibid, 296–97, *ḥadīṭ*s 643, 644, 645. Also in: al-Bayhaqī, *Al-Asmāʾ wa-l-sifāt*, 2: 404–05.

Abī Tālib's dialogue with the Prophet. 'Alī ibn Abī Tālib was the rear man and the disciple, but later he became the front man and the master. This lovely anecdote discloses the reason for God's laughter: He laughs out of astonishment, when people recognize that He is the one and only benefactor, forgiving, and omnipotent.

Laughter as an indicator of astonishment was one of the theories pursued by Muslim physicians. The celebrated physician, Ishāq ibn 'Imrān (fl. in the second half of the ninth century) emphasized: "Laughter is defined as the astonishment of the soul at (observing) something that it is not in a position to understand clearly."⁶³ The question whether astonishment can be attributed to God, the all-knower, was answered by later theologians, as will be discussed below.

Improper Laughter and the Islamic Creed

The *ḥadīths* cited previously became a part of the traditionalist dogma. A profession of faith attributed to Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal (d. 855), the eponym of the ultra-traditionalist Ḥanbalī school, specifically states:

We believe that God sits on His throne. However, He is not confined to limitations of space. We believe that God sees and hears and talks and laughs and is joyful.⁶⁴

Nevertheless, like other anthropomorphic descriptions of God in the Hadith, the *ḥadīths* describing God's laughter were not glossed. The question, "but how exactly does God laugh?" was obliterated.⁶⁵ The basic traditionalistic approach demanded an acceptance of the contents of these and other anthropomorphic *ḥadīths*. A twelfth-century *muḥaddith* was asked by his disciples, what is the meaning of the Prophet's saying: "Our Lord will laugh because of His servants' despair, and because He knows that the time for Him to change things is near." His answer was very blunt:

⁶³ Franz Rosenthal, *Humor in Early Islam*, repr. (1956; Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Publishers 1976), 134. According to Amman, the concept that laughter is caused by surprise (*ta'āggub*) comes from theological discussions, and not from Greek authors. Amman, *Vorbild und Vernunft*, 14–19.

⁶⁴ Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyyah, *Hādī al-arwāḥ*, 436. Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal's creed (one of six) was fully translated by: William Montgomery Watt, *Islamic Creeds: A Selection* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994), 33–40.

⁶⁵ This traditionalist approach is called *bi-lā kayfa*, that is: without asking how. Fairly a lot has been written on this approach. See, for example, R. M. Frank, "Elements in the Development of the Teaching of al-Ash'arī," *Le Muséon* 104 (1991): 141–90.

This *ḥadīṭ* is well-known. Transmitting it is a habitual practice. An attempt to discredit its content is an undesired innovation. An attempt to interpret the laughter is hypocrisy and apostasy.⁶⁶

Others, less rigid traditionalists, hinted that God's laughter symbolizes God's grace and good will. A ninth century *muḥaddīṭ* promised his disciples:

Whoever says *al-ḥamdu li-llāh* (Praise be to God) five times, God looks at him. Whoever says *al-ḥamdu li-llāh* a lot, God laughs in his presence. Whoever perpetually says *al-ḥamdu li-llāh*, God orders [the angels]: write it down again and again, forever.⁶⁷

However, to inquire how this laughter is preformed was totally inappropriate. This position is stated in the words of the important traditionalist theologian al-Bayhaqī (d. 1066). As an Aṣ'arī, al-Bayhaqī's represents a stand which combines traditionalism with rationalism:

The ancients from our school were inspired by these *ḥadīṭs* to awaken [in themselves and in their disciples] the ambition to do good deeds and works, and [to contemplate] on God's grace. They were not preoccupied with interpreting God's laughter. [This was] in conformity with their conviction that God does not possess body organs and articulators. It is impossible to describe Him as baring His teeth or opening His mouth.⁶⁸

In one of the rare remarks he penned himself, Abū Bakr al-Āğurri determined:

I wish that God leads me and you to the right path of faith and good deeds. You should know, that the People of the True Faith describe God exactly as He describes Himself, as the Prophet describes Him and as the Companions describe Him. This is the way of the learned men. Whoever takes this path will never ask: How [does God laugh]? Rather, he will accept this and believe in this. [He will believe] that God Almighty laughs, because these are the teachings transmitted to us from the Prophet and his Companions. Whoever denies this should be condemned by the People of the True Faith.⁶⁹

In the closing part of the chapter describing God's laughter in *Kitāb al-ṣarī'ah*, al-Āğurri writes:

These are all the textual evidence, in which we believe. We never ask: How [is it possible]? Since those who transmitted these *ḥadīṭs* to us, transmitted to us *ḥadīṭs* about

⁶⁶ The *muḥaddīṭ* is Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wāhid (d. 1149). His saying is quoted in a biographical entry dedicated to him in: Abū al-Ḥusayn Muḥammad ibn Abī Ya'lā (d. 1132; the son of Abū Ya'lā), *Ṭabaqāt al-fuqahā' al-ḥanābilah*, ed. 'Alī Muḥammad 'Umar (Cairo: Maktabat al-Ṭaḳāfah al-Dīniyyah 1998), 2: 92.

⁶⁷ Ibn Abī Ya'lā, *Ṭabaqāt al-fuqahā' al-ḥanābilah*, 1: 506.

⁶⁸ Al-Bayhaqī, *Al-Asmā' wa-l-sifāt*, 2: 414.

⁶⁹ Al-Āğurri, *Kitāb al-ṣarī'ah*, 292.

the correct way to perform ablution, and the correct way to conduct prayers, and the correct way to fast etc. All the scholars deemed the entire dicta transmitted by [the Companions] reliable. So beware of he who asks: how is it possible?⁷⁰

All the traditionalists were actually referring to the same Hadith material, in which the Prophet's laughter illustrating God's laughter is mentioned. None of the above *ḥadīths* provided any details about God's laughter. However, there were extraordinary *ḥadīths* that took the description of God's laughter a step further. The eleventh century Hanbalī theologian Abū Ya'la (d. 1066) wrote a treatise on God's attributes, in which he quoted a cluster of *ḥadīths*. Among these *ḥadīths* appears the following version, quoting the Prophet's companion Ḡābir ibn 'Abdallāh (d. ca. 695):

I heard the Messenger of God saying: "On the Day of Resurrection my community will arrive at a hill, placed above all the other nations. Each nation in its turn will be given its idols. Then our Lord will come to us by foot, and say [to the believers]: 'What are you waiting for?' And they will say: 'We are waiting for our Lord.' He shall respond: 'I am your Lord.' They will say: 'If only we could see you!' And then He shall be revealed to them laughing to such an extent that His uvula is seen. After that, they will start following Him."⁷¹

In another version, also quoting Ḡābir, the Prophet promises that God will laugh until His uvula and molars are revealed to the Muslims.⁷² The meaning of this laughter is rather perplexing. From the parallel *ḥadīths* describing the same situation, which were quoted above, the laughter of God is a sign of His grace and benevolence, or a sign of His astonishment. However, a laughter which reveals molars like the one attributed to God in the *ḥadīth* quoted by Abū Ya'la, has undoubtedly intimidating connotations in Arabic literature. "The war reveals its molars, while the blood of both parties is being shed," and: "The most evil of men laughs while revealing his molars when he sees me" are two examples from Pre-Islamic poetry (from before the seventh century), which indicate that a laughter which reveals molars is ominous.⁷³

⁷⁰ Al-Ġurri, *Kitāb al-ṣarīḥ*, 299.

⁷¹ Abū Ya'la Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥusayn ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Farrā', *Ibtāl al-ta'wīlāt li-ahbār al-ṣifāt*, ed. Abū 'Abdallāh Muḥammad ibn Hamd al-Hamūd al-Naḡdī (Kuwait: Maktabat Dār al-Imām al-Ḍahabī, 1989), 213, 218. The text specifically emphasizes that God has *lahawāt* (uvulae, in the plural).

⁷² Abū Ya'la, *Ibtāl al-ta'wīlāt*, 214.

⁷³ These citations are taken from two *qaṣīdahs* (odes), written by two Pre-Islamic poets. The odes appear in one of the most important anthologies of classical Arabic poetry, compiled by the Kufan philologist, al-Mufaḍḍal al-Ḍabbī (d. ca. 784). Al-Mufaḍḍal ibn Muḥammad al-Ḍabbī, *Al-Mufaḍḍaliyyāt*, ed. Aḥmad Muḥammad Ṣākir and 'Abd al-Salām Ḥārūn, 3rd ed. (1942; Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1964), 282 (*qaṣīdah* 74, verse 12), 294 (*qaṣīdah* 77, verse 9). The *Mufaḍḍaliyyāt* were translated to English: Mufaḍḍal al-Ḍabbī, *al-Mufaḍḍaliyyāt*, ed. and trans. Charles James Lyall. 2

The text cited by Abū Yaʿlā conveys an atmosphere of horror, which to some extent contradicts the intended message of this *ḥadīth*. Also, the description of God’s laughter in this *ḥadīth* seems to be rather peculiar. Still, Abū Yaʿlā saw it as his duty to cite this extraordinary text, because he never doubted the authenticity of this *ḥadīth*. However, elsewhere in his treatise he explained that a literal reading should be applied to this text, without any attempt to interpret it. After citing the *ḥadīth*, he states:

We do not assert [that God has] a laughter which includes the opening of the mouth, and grinning while showing the teeth. We do not assert [that God has] molars and uvula, which are body organs and parts. What we assert is an attribute, even though we do not grasp its meaning. It is precisely the same as we assert [that God has] face and hands; that He hears and sees.⁷⁴

Abū Yaʿlā, then, took three approaches to the text: the first approach is to interpret the molars and uvula literally, meaning God indeed has a mouth with molars and uvula; the second approach is to admit that we do not know the meaning of these body parts, and that we will never attempt to depict them; the third approach is to crown the molars and uvula as God’s attributes. However, Abū Yaʿlā called for both a literal understanding of the anthropomorphic texts and for ignoring the problematic passages. He offered a reading technique which did not interfere with the content of the texts, as much as it did not inquire about the meaning of the texts. An acceptance combined with a certain degree of ignorance is Abū Yaʿlā’s stance.

Elsewhere, Abū Yaʿlā rejected the possibility of a figurative reading, meaning he could not interpret God’s laughter as God’s benevolence, and explained:

This possibility should be rejected, because the text states: ‘He will be revealed to them laughing to such an extent that His molars and uvula are seen.’⁷⁵

The mention of the molars and uvula serves as textual evidence for Abū Yaʿlā, that the laughter is not a metaphor of benevolence. If we continue his train of argumentation, we can say that since benevolence does not have molars and uvula, the laughter is laughter *per se*.

Abū Yaʿlā seemed to be walking on solid ground regarding the peculiar text on God’s uvula and molars. However, his argumentation was not solid, because unlike the other *ḥadīths* describing God’s laughter, the *ḥadīth* that describes the laughter which reveals molars and uvula was considered “feeble” (*daʿīf*) by the scholars of Hadith, not because of its content, but because of a flaw in its chain of

vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1918–1921).

⁷⁴ Abū Yaʿlā, *Ibtāl al-taʿwīlāt*, 218.

⁷⁵ Abū Yaʿlā, *Ibtāl al-taʿwīlāt*, 219.

transmitters. This designation means that the authenticity of this text and its attribution to either the Prophet or one of his disciples is dubious.⁷⁶ On these grounds, Abū Yaʿlā was attacked by the thirteenth century traditionalist Hanbali theologian, Ibn al-Ġawzī (d. 1201).

Merlin Swartz described Ibn al-Ġawzī's attack on Abū Yaʿlā in a comprehensive introduction to Swartz's annotated translation of one of Ibn al-Ġawzī's treatises on divine attributes.⁷⁷ Daniel Gimaret also discussed Ibn al-Ġawzī's attack in his book on anthropomorphism in Islamic traditionalism.⁷⁸ Both Swartz and Gimaret knew of Abū Yaʿlā's position only from the citations of his antagonist Ibn al-Ġawzī. The following is a summary of Ibn al-Ġawzī's argumentations against Abū Yaʿlā, which offers a new angle to Ibn al-Ġawzī's position.

Ibn al-Ġawzī was a Hanbali theologian and preacher, but he was also an exponent of figurative interpretation of the anthropomorphic descriptions of God in the Quran and Hadith. In that sense, he was closer to the Aṣʿarī school than to his own school. Apart from his hermeneutical agenda, he was concerned by the reputation of the Hanbali school as a group of ignorant anthropomorphists. Ibn al-Ġawzī targeted three prominent Hanbali scholars, among whom was Abū Yaʿlā, who "wrote books in which they disgraced this school."⁷⁹ To this end, he composed his treatise *al-Bāz al-aṣḥab al-munqaḍḍ ʿalā muḥālifi al-madhab* (The Gray Falcon Which Attacks the Offenders of the [Hanbali] School),⁸⁰ in which he condemned the blunt unsophisticated reading of the texts, which these scholars offered:

They believed that He has a form and a face in addition to His Self. They believed that He has two eyes, a mouth, a uvula and molars, a face which is light and splendor, two hands, including the palms of hands, fingers including the little fingers and the thumbs, a back, and two legs divided into thighs and shanks.⁸¹

According to Ibn al-Ġawzī, the literal approach taken by these three scholars lowered them to the ranks of commoners. Moreover, the blunt anthropomorphic

⁷⁶ On the traditional Hadith criticism and the techniques of examining a *ḥadīth*'s authenticity, see: Siddiqi, *Hadith Literature*, 107–16.

⁷⁷ Merlin L. Swartz, *A Medieval Critique of Anthropomorphism: Ibn al-Jawzī's Kitāb Akhbār as-Sifāt*. Islamic Philosophy, Theology, and Science, 46 (Leiden, Boston, and Cologne: Brill, 2002), 46–64.

⁷⁸ Gimaret, *Dieu à l'image de l'homme*, 53–57.

⁷⁹ These three were: Abū ʿAbdallāh ibn Hāmid (d. 1012), "his friend," the Qādī Abū Yaʿlā and Ibn al-Zāgūnī (d. 1132). Swartz, *A Medieval Critique*, 135–36, fns. 235–36, elaborates on them.

⁸⁰ Abū al-Faraġ ʿAbd al-Rahmān Ibn al-Ġawzī, *al-Bāz al-aṣḥab al-munqaḍḍ ʿalā muḥālifi al-madhab*, ed. Muhammad Munīr al-Imām, (Beirut: Dār al-Ġinān 1987). This title is also known as *Daḡ ʿṣubah al-taṣbih bi-akaff al-tanzih*. *Al-Bāz al-aṣḥab* resembles Ibn al-Ġawzī's *Kitāb aḥbār al-sifāt*. Although Swartz did a commendable job in publishing the Unicom manuscript of *Kitāb aḥbār al-sifāt*, I preferred to use the Arabic text of *al-Bāz al-aṣḥab*, and the translations of this text are mine.

⁸¹ Ibn al-Ġawzī, *Al-Bāz al-aṣḥab*, 34.

message they conveyed in their sermons attracted a considerable number of commoners, who followed these scholars and their teachings.⁸² As a preacher, Ibn al-Ġawzī was concerned with the low standards of popular preachers, who used pseudo-*ḥadīths* or unauthenticated *ḥadīths* in their sermons. Ibn al-Ġawzī was well-aware of a number of dangers awaiting the preacher: the oral nature of the Hadith literature combined with the exciting atmosphere of a sermon, can easily lead the preacher to say things which do not exactly appear in the Prophetic dicta. Thus, Ibn al-Ġawzī attacked those three prominent Hanbalī scholars and preachers for using questionable *ḥadīths*, and giving the same weight to *ḥadīths* which were regarded as the most authentic and reliable and to those *ḥadīths* whose reliability and authenticity were dubious.⁸³ A reckless use of the Hadith material eventually led these scholars to add more descriptions and attributes to God.⁸⁴

In another treatise, which discusses the low standards of preachers and story-tellers, Ibn al-Ġawzī was forthright against preaching about God's attributes and other metaphysical issues to the masses:

It is not suitable for the preacher to discourse on matters relating to theology except to say that the Quran is the uncreated word of God and that the expressions relating to the attributes of God should be allowed to pass just as they were revealed. No matter what may occur to mind with respect to the attributes of God, that He is like such and such, He is, in fact, different "for there is nothing like Him." It is a well-known fact that the learned men themselves find it impossible to establish a firm position on these matters ... How then can common untutored folk do so since all they ever hear are vain disputations and false doctrines?⁸⁵

Ibn al-Ġawzī's had a fascinating explanation for the use of anthropomorphic language in the Quran and the Hadith. Rooted in the Islamic tradition of recording and reconstructing the history of ancient heresies, Ibn al-Ġawzī explained that the Prophet needed time in order to introduce the One transcendent God to people who were used to worship material idols. The Prophet had to use an anthropomorphic language when describing God to the new converts to Islam. For example, when they asked him: "Describe Our Lord to us," the following verse descended from the sky: "Say: God is One." (Q. 112:1). Ibn al-Ġawzī continues:

⁸² Ibn al-Ġawzī, *Al-Bāz al-aṣḥab*, 34.

⁸³ Ibn al-Ġawzī, *Al-Bāz al-aṣḥab*, 36–37.

⁸⁴ Ibn al-Ġawzī, *Al-Bāz al-aṣḥab*, 36–37.

⁸⁵ Merlin L. Swartz, *Ibn al-Jawzī's Kitāb al-Qusṣās wa'l-Mudhakkirīn* (Beirut: Dar el-Machreq Éditeurs 1969), 227–28. The above cited text was translated by Swartz. I deleted the transliterated Arabic text, which originally appears in parentheses.

Had the Prophet answered, that God is not a body, nor an atom, nor an accident; not tall, not wide, is not in any place, has no dimension, does not move and does not stay . . . they would probably reply: You ask us to worship a void.⁸⁶

That is why, says Ibn al-Ġawzī, the Prophet answered in the affirmative, when he was asked: "Does God really laugh?"⁸⁷

On the one hand, Ibn al-Ġawzī suggests that the preachers will avoid introducing the anthropomorphic *ḥadīths* to the masses. On the other hand, the scholars must study these *ḥadīths*, using the strictest standards of evaluating the material at hand. For example, the *ḥadīth* "He laughed until His molars and uvula were revealed," has a flaw in its chain of transmitters, and therefore cannot be considered the most authentic piece of evidence a theologian uses. Furthermore, there is evidence that even Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal himself, the eponym of the Ḥanbalī school, labeled this particular *ḥadīth* as "ugly and offensive."⁸⁸

Ibn al-Ġawzī then develops two solutions to read the problematic *ḥadīth*. The first solution takes into consideration the way this *ḥadīth* was transmitted by the Prophet. The laughter which reveals molars and uvula is actually the Prophet's and not God's. The second solution is to apply figurative interpretation to the text:

. . . there are two possibilities [to read the text]: the first one, is that the description 'he laughed until his molars and uvula were revealed' is attributed to the Prophet, as if he laughed when he reported on God's laughter. The second possibility is that this is a metaphorical laughter, denoting that God's kindness is abundant, and His satisfaction is wide.⁸⁹

Ibn al-Ġawzī, then, points out the connection between God's laughter and the Prophet's laughter: while transmitting the text describing God's laughter, the Prophet's laughter served as an illustrator of this divine laughter. While God's laughter is metaphorical, denoting His grace and benevolence, the Prophet's laughter is human and physical:

Laughter which seizes humans is involved in the opening of the mouth. This is inconceivable when ascribed to God. The word 'laughter' must be in accordance to the way God reveals His kindness and grace. So, [when the Prophet says]: "I laughed because of my Lord's laughter," that means: "I revealed my teeth by opening my mouth, because He revealed His kindness and grace."⁹⁰

⁸⁶ Ibn al-Ġawzī, *Al-Bāz al-aṣḥab*, 38.

⁸⁷ Ibn al-Ġawzī, *Al-Bāz al-aṣḥab*, 38.

⁸⁸ Ibn al-Ġawzī, *Al-Bāz al-aṣḥab*, 90.

⁸⁹ Ibn al-Ġawzī, *Al-Bāz al-aṣḥab*, 90.

⁹⁰ Ibn al-Ġawzī, *Al-Bāz al-aṣḥab*, 89–90.

Underneath this sophisticated explanation lies the basic fact, that the Prophet mimics God's laughter, or demonstrates God's laughter by his own laughter. This physical gesture is equivalent to comparing God's laughter to the Prophet's laughter. But that seems to be acceptable by Ibn al-Ġawzī. The most important thing for him is to figuratively interpret God's laughter as God's grace. Completing his attack on Abū Ya'lā, Ibn al-Ġawzī expresses his disappointment of Abū Ya'lā's literal reading, but more so of Abū Ya'lā's use of a *ḥadīth* of a dubious source: "By God, even if these *ḥadīths* on the molars were in the two most reliable Hadith compilations, the *Ṣaḥīḥān*, they would have to be rejected, and all the more so because these texts were not substantiated."⁹¹ And he concludes: "Whoever confirms that God has molars as a divine attribute, has absolutely no knowledge of Islam."⁹² Ibn al-Ġawzī, then, calls for both a figurative reading of the anthropomorphic texts, and ignoring the texts with the vulgar descriptions of God, such as the description of the laughter which reveals the uvula and molars.

Laughter and Ethos

Stepping aside from the theological implications of the *ḥadīths* describing God's laughter, we must bear in mind that even the description of the Prophet laughing was not taken for granted. Laughter was considered a problematic human feature, indicating loss of control.⁹³ Numerous textual proofs indicate that the traditionalists were characterized by their aversion to laughter and lightheadedness.⁹⁴ Their idea of pious and solemn behavior did not correspond with the description of the Prophet's laughter, which reveals molars. Still, they could not ignore the Hadith material which attributed laughter to the Prophet and to God. In order to settle this apparent contradiction with their worldview, the traditionalists had to rationalize the Prophet's laughter, applying their hermeneutics principles to the *ḥadīths* in question.

⁹¹ Ibn al-Ġawzī, *Al-Bāz al-aṣḥab*, 91. *Al-Ṣaḥīḥān*, meaning the two sound Hadith collections, were compiled by Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl al-Buḥārī (d. 870) and Muslim ibn al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ (d. 875). See: Siddiqi, *Hadīth Literature*, 53–60.

⁹² Ibn al-Ġawzī, *Al-Bāz al-aṣḥab*, 91.

⁹³ 'Alī ibn Rabban al-Ṭabarī (d. ca. 850) described in his medical encyclopedia: "[L]aughter is (the result of) the boiling of the natural blood (which happens) when a human being sees or hears something that diverts him and thus startles and moves him. If he then does not employ his ability to think in connection with it, he is seized by laughter." Ibn Rabban continues with a reference to the definition of man as a laughing animal. Rosenthal, *Humor in Early Islam*, 133.

⁹⁴ Christopher Melchert, "The Piety of the Hadith Folk," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 34.3 (Aug. 2002): 425–39; here 428.

As a matter of fact, there are two opposing trends in the Hadith literature: the Prophet laughs; the Prophet does not laugh. These opposing claims can be found even in one text. One such example appears in the encyclopedia for the educated, authored by the Andalusian scholar Ibn ‘Abd Rabbihi (d. 940). In a chapter describing the Prophet, which is based on Hadith material, Ibn ‘Abd Rabbihi claims that the Prophet “did not laugh, but smiled.”⁹⁵ In a chapter discussing laughter, Ibn ‘Abd Rabbihi states that “the Prophet used to laugh until his molars were revealed.”⁹⁶ This statement is also based on Hadith literature. Since Ludwig Amman thoroughly treated the Hadith material describing the Prophet’s laughter and absence of laughter,⁹⁷ I will not repeat Amman’s findings, but rather provide two illuminating examples from one of Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyyah’s works, *Hidāyat al-ḥayārā fi aḡwibat al-yahūd wa-l-naṣārā* (Guiding the Bewildered, on Responses to the Jews and the Christians).

Hidāyat al-ḥayārā is one of the renowned works in the field of the Islamic polemic with the Jews and the Christians. In this work, Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyyah detects textual hints in the Bible, predicting Muḥammad’s arrival and attesting the veracity of his prophecy. Among the textual proofs which Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyyah presents, the following are two texts: one claims that the Prophet never laughed, while the other claims that he did laugh.

The first text is the verses in the Book of Isaiah, which according to Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyyah, refer to the Prophet Muḥammad. This is Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyyah’s reading of Isaiah, 42:1–2:

Behold My Servant, whom I uphold, Mine Elect, in whom My soul delighteth: I have put My Spirit upon him; he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles. He will not laugh, nor cause His voice to be heard in the street.⁹⁸

Evidently, Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyyah read these verses as a prophecy predicting the arrival of Muḥammad, who is characterized in this text by not laughing and keeping his voice low. Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyyah did not read Hebrew, and it is

⁹⁵ Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd Rabbihi, *Al-Iqd al-farīd*, ed. ‘Abd al-Maḡīd al-Tarḥūnī, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah 1983), 5: 4.

⁹⁶ Ibn ‘Abd Rabbihi, *Al-Iqd al-farīd*, 8: 91.

⁹⁷ Amman, *Vorbild und Vernunft*, 42–69

⁹⁸ Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyyah, *Hidāyat al-ḥayārā fi aḡwibat al-yahūd wa-l-naṣārā*, ed. ‘Uṭmān Ġum‘ah Dumayriyyah (Mecca: Dār ‘Ālim al-Fawā’id li-l-Naṣr wa-l-Tawzī’, 2008), 174. For the polemical use made by Muslim scholars of verses from the Book of Isaiah, viewing these verses as a description of Muḥammad, see Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, 75–110. The first verses of chapter 42 in the book of Isaiah, according to Lazarus-Yafeh, inspired a *ḥadīth*, which states that the Bible prophesized, that Muḥammad “will be neither harsh nor coarse nor will he raise his voice in the market streets.” Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, 78. On the same *ḥadīth*, see: Uri Rubin, *The Eye of the Beholder: The Life of Muḥammad as Viewed by the Early Muslims* (Princeton, NJ: The Darwin Press 1995), 30–35.

unclear which Arabic translation or translations of the Bible he used.⁹⁹ His quotation of Isaiah 42:1–2 in fact reflects a misreading of the Hebrew source, which states: "He will not cry (*lō yiṣ'āq*)," and not: "He will not laugh." However, in the Arabic translation that Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyyah quoted, the Hebrew phrase *lō yiṣ'āq* is translated to the Arabic *lā yadhku*, meaning "He will not laugh."¹⁰⁰ This mistranslation can be explained by the phonetic similarity between the Hebrew verbs *yiṣ'āq* (will cry, will shout) and *yish'āq* (will laugh), because the consonants *āyn* (in Arabic also *āyn*) and *het* (in Arabic *hā'*) are pharyngeal. All the same, the Arabic translation of Isaiah 42:1–2, on which Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyyah based his interpretation, is wrong.¹⁰¹

According to Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyyah, the description of the servant of God who allegedly "will not laugh" alludes to Muḥammad: "The phrase 'shall not laugh' corresponds with the Prophet's description. According to 'Ā'īshah (d. 678; Muḥammad's beloved wife and a *muḥaddithah*, i.e., a *ḥadīth*-transmitter in her own right), the Prophet was never seen laughing until his uvula was revealed. He was always seen smiling."¹⁰² 'Ā'īshah's view reflected the conventional depiction of the

⁹⁹ Qayyim al-Ġawziyyah's primary source for Biblical references is Samaw'al al-Maġribī, a Jewish convert to Islam (d. 1175). However, Samaw'al's book does not contain a reference to Isaiah 42:1–2. Samaw'al al-Maġribī, *Ifḥām al-yahūd: Silencing the Jews*, ed. Moshe Perlmann (New York: American Academy for Jewish Research, 1964). See also: Moshe Perlmann, "Ibn Qayyim and Samau'al al-Maġribī," *Journal of Jewish Bibliography* 3 (1942): 71–74. The problem of the Arabic translations of the Bible is discussed by Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, 111–129. Lazarus-Yafeh dedicates a place in the discussion to Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyyah's knowledge of the Bible. Ibid, 126. For a discussion of the knowledge which Muslim scholars until the thirteenth century had of the Hebrew Bible, see Ibid, 75ff. Lazarus-Yafeh determines that Muslim scholars used only specific lists of Biblical verses. The Muslim scholars combined "purported Biblical quotations" with "an almost literal translation of Biblical verse." Ibid, 78. For an excellent discussion on a Qur'ān commentator who was very well-read in the Bible, see: Walid Saleh, "'Sublime in Its Style, Exquisite in Its Tenderness': the Hebrew Bible Quotations in al-Biqā'ī's Qur'ān Commentary," *Adaptations and Innovations: Studies on the Interaction between Jewish and Islamic Thought and Literature from the Early Middle Ages to the Late Twentieth Century, Dedicated to Professor Joel L. Kraemer*, ed. Y. Tzvi Langermann and Josef Stern (Paris, Louvain, and Dudley, MA: Peeters, 2007), 331–47.

¹⁰⁰ An identical quotation of Isaiah 42:1–2 appears in the book about the Biblical predictions on Muḥammad's prophetic mission by the Arab scholar of Sicilian origin, Ibn Zafar (d. ca. 1171). Abū 'Abdallāh Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn Zafar al-Siqillī, *Hayr al-biṣar bi-hayr al-baṣar*, eds. Laṭīfah Ṣūkrī and Ḥadiġah Abūrī (Rabat: Markaz al-Dirāsāt wa-l-Abḥāt wa-l-hyā' ai-Turāt, 2008), 99. However, it is not clear whether Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyyah knew Ibn Zafar's work. It is noteworthy, that although Lazarus-Yafeh quoted *Hidāyat al-hayārā* and *Hayr al-biṣar* extensively, she did not mention the "misreading" of Ibn Zafar and Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyyah.

¹⁰¹ The roots *ḍ-ḥ-k* (laugh, in Arabic), *ṣ-ḥ-q* and *s-ḥ-q* (laugh, in Hebrew) are actually variants. Edward Lipinski, *Semitic Languages Outline of a Comparative Grammar*. Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta, 80 (Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters en Departement Oosterse Studies, 2001), 111–12.

¹⁰² Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyyah, *Hidāyat al-hayārā*, 131. See also: 'Abdallāh ibn al-Mubārak (d. 797), *Al-Zuhd wa-l-raḡā'iq*, ed. Aḥmad Farīd (Riyadh: Dār al-Mi'rāġ al-Dawliyyah li-l-Naṣr 1995), 265;

Prophet as solemn and self-restraint. As Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyyah explains: “That is because laughing a lot is a result of lightheadedness and stupidity, whereas smiling is an indication of good and intelligent behavior.”¹⁰³

Nevertheless, Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyyah is forced to admit that in the books of the ancients (by which he means the Hadith literature, but perhaps in addition the Judeo-Christian scriptures), there is a reference to the Prophet as “He, the frequent Laughter and the Slayer” (*al-daḥūk al-qattāl*).¹⁰⁴ According to Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyyah, the combination of these two epithets means that the Prophet’s good nature did not prevent him from being an instrument of punishment in the hands of God. Likewise, his being an instrument of punishment did not cause him to lose his good nature. All the same, the Prophet did not laugh a lot, but acted as was appropriate according to the circumstances. His laughter, claims Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyyah, was an outcome of a well-balanced behavior (*ītidāl*).¹⁰⁵

Following this line of argumentation, it was easier to accept the *ḥadīths* which describe the Prophet’s laughter. In the traditionalist circles, which perceived laughter as inappropriate, argumentations for the Prophet’s laughter paved the way for an acceptance of this human conduct.

A Hermeneutical Approach to God’s Laughter

The Prophet’s laughter as described in the eschatological *ḥadīths* is, then, a reflection of God’s laughter. The traditionalists needed to extensively process the Hadith material to determine that laughter can be used as an appropriate attribute of God. Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 1328), a prominent theologian and jurisprudent—and the mentor of Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyyah—discussed this issue in one of his theological *responsa*.

Indeed there were several theological attempts which preceded Ibn Taymiyyah’s endeavor to explain God’s laughter. One such plausible attempt was Abū Sulaymān al-Ḥaṭṭābī (d. 996 or 998). Al-Ḥaṭṭābī claimed that it is impossible to

Muḥammad ibn Yūsuf al-Šāmī, (d. 1535), *Subul al-hudā wa-l-rašād fī sirat ḥayr al-‘ibād*, ed. Muṣṭafā ‘Abd al-Wāḥid (Cairo: Laḡnat Ihyā’ al-Turāt al-Islāmī 1997), 7: 191–95.

¹⁰³ Ibn Qayyim al-al-Ġawziyyah, *Hidāyat al-ḥayārā*, 131.

¹⁰⁴ There were a lot of speculations on the meaning of the epithet *al-daḥūk*. In a *ḥadīth* on the authority of the Prophet’s Companion, Ibn ‘Abbās (d. 687), the Prophet’s name in the Torah is *Aḥmad al-daḥūk*. The traditionalist al-Ḍaḥḥāk (d. 828) connects the name *al-daḥūk* with the Prophet’s laughter. In an attempt to settle the contradiction between the claim that the Prophet did not laugh, and the *ḥadīths* claiming that he did, al-Ḍaḥḥāk suggests that the adjective *al-daḥūk* means that the Prophet almost always smiled, but laughed until his molars were revealed. Al-Šāmī, *Subul al-hudā*, 1:598; 7:195–97. See also a discussion in Lazarus Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, 88.

¹⁰⁵ Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyyah, *Hidāyat al-ḥayārā*, 131. See also, Rubin, *The Eye of the Beholder*, 36.

attribute laughter to God, because it is well-known that laughter in humans is caused by pleasure and joy. Therefore, al-Ḥaṭṭābī's suggestion was to see God's laughter in the *ḥadīths* as a metaphor to the astonishment He arouses in the hearts of humans, "so that when they see Him, He makes them laugh."¹⁰⁶ Before al-Ḥaṭṭābī, Ibn Qutaybah (d. 889) argued that human laughter is caused by astonishment. God's laughter and astonishment should, therefore, be interpreted not necessarily as God laughing, but as God causing laughter and astonishment in everyone who hears Him.¹⁰⁷

However, Ibn Taymiyyah's well-argued discussion on God's laughter intended to break any link between human psychology and God's actions. He did not wish to retreat to the recourse of figurative interpretation, but to argue that God indeed laughs. To the best of my knowledge, Ibn Taymiyyah's treatment of God's laughter has not yet received any attention in modern scholarship.

Ibn Taymiyyah was the spokesman of Islamic traditionalism, but at the same time he used rationalistic arguments to corroborate his traditionalistic world view.¹⁰⁸ In other words, he unequivocally supported the traditionalistic notion of affirming God's attributes without comparing Him to His creation. In order to do so, Ibn Taymiyyah mounted his rational arguments on the basis of an advanced hermeneutical reading in the Quran and Hadith. Also, he never hesitated to use purely rational arguments, relying on human reason and not necessarily on the scriptures. In fact, in numerous cases Ibn Taymiyyah used the formula "as proves the Quran, Sunna (i.e., Hadith) and human reason."¹⁰⁹ Ibn Taymiyyah argued that in spite of their common names (living, knowing, hearing, seeing etc.), the divine attributes do not resemble the human attributes.¹¹⁰

As part of his description of the divine attributes, Ibn Taymiyyah also addressed the theological implications of the descriptions of God's laughter in the Hadith. This discussion was ignited by an elaborate question referred to Ibn Taymiyyah by an anonymous believer, who could be either an actual person, or a literary device which Ibn Taymiyyah used in order to delve into the subject.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁶ Al-Ḥaṭṭābī's view is cited in al-Bayhaqī, *Al-Asmā' wa-l-sifāt*, 2: 401–02.

¹⁰⁷ Ibn Qutaybah, *Ta'wīl muḥtalaḥ al-ḥadīth* (Cairo: Maktabat Zaydān al-'Umūmiyyah 1925), 266–67. Amman also discussed Ibn Qutaybah's view. Amman, *Vorbild und Vernunft*, 24–25.

¹⁰⁸ See, for example: Wael B. Hallaq, "Ibn Taymiyya on the Existence of God," *Acta Orientalia* 52 (1991): 49–69.

¹⁰⁹ For example: Taqī al-Dīn Ahmad ibn Taymiyyah, *Minhāḡ al-sunnah al-nabawiyyah*, ed. Muḥammad Rašād Sālīm (Cairo: Maktabat Ibn Taymiyyah, 1986), 5: 99.

¹¹⁰ Jon Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya's Theodicy of Perpetual Optimism*. Islamic Philosophy, Theology, and Science, 73 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2007), 50–51.

¹¹¹ Taqī al-Dīn Ahmad ibn Taymiyyah, *Maḡmū'āt al-fatāwā*, eds. 'Amir al-Ġazzār and Anwar al-Bāz (Al-Mansura- Riyadh: Dār al-Wafā' li-l-ṭibā'ah wa-l-Naṣr wa-l-Tawzī' and Maktabat al-'Abikān, 1998), 6: 43–84. Ibn Taymiyyah's response is also known as "al-Akmaliyyah" (lit. the epistle of

The anonymous believer, who seems to be well-versed in Islamic speculative theology (*kalām*) states at the beginning of his question that a consensual premise in Islamic theology determines, that it is obligatory to ascribe to God only attributes connoting perfection (*ṣifāt kamāl*), a term which the anonymous believer does not define. He then describes at length a controversy about God's attributes among the different trends in Islam. While the traditionalists, to which he refers as "The People of the Tradition" (*ahl al-sunnah*), affirm the existence of a variety of divine attributes, other trends- like the rationalist Mu'tazilah,¹¹² tend to negate the majority of these attributes by using rationalistic arguments.

The anonymous believer then lists the divine attributes, whose origins are from the Quran, but mostly from the Hadith literature, which "the People of Tradition" affirm: hearing, seeing, life, power, knowledge and speech. Attributes connoting actions are also included in this list: descending, sitting and laughing (*ḍahḥ*).¹¹³ However, some of these attributes were rejected by the rationalists, because these attributes implied that God was not perfect. For example, the rationalists negated the existence of love (*maḥabbah*) in God, "because love indicates a relationship between the lover and his loved one, but this kind of a relationship between God and His creation indicates imperfection (*naqs*)."¹¹⁴ These thinkers, continues the anonymous believer, also deny the existence of anger (*ḡaḍab*) and laughter (*ḍahḥ*) in God, "because anger indicates that the blood of the heart is boiling, as it seeks revenge. Similarly they deny God's laughter and astonishment, because laughter indicates lightheadedness. [Laughter] happens when something happy just occurs, and when something damaging is driven away."¹¹⁵

The anonymous believer is therefore perplexed, and seeks an answer to the question: what can be defined as attributes of perfection?

Ibn Taymiyyah's more than forty pages response (in the printed edition) begins by establishing two premises. The first premise is that perfection, which in God's case "arrives at the maximum limit of perfection and completeness," is stable and permanent in God. Since God's perfection is permanent, this negates the possibility of imperfection in God's essence.¹¹⁶ This perfection is described in various Quranic verses. For example, "He is God, God is One, the Everlasting

God's attributes of perfection). Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya's Theodicy*, 62–63.

¹¹² For the best discussion on the Mu'tazilah and their approach toward God's attributes, see Josef van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra: eine Geschichte des religiösen Denkens im frühen Islam* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1997), 4:361–424. Also recommended is: Josef van Ess, "Tashbih wa-Tanzīh," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*. Second Edition, 10 (2000), 341–44.

¹¹³ Ibn Taymiyyah, *Maḡmū'āt al-fatāwā*, 6:43.

¹¹⁴ Ibn Taymiyyah, *Maḡmū'āt al-fatāwā*, 6:43.

¹¹⁵ Ibn Taymiyyah, *Maḡmū'āt al-fatāwā*, 6:44.

¹¹⁶ Ibn Taymiyyah, *Maḡmū'āt al-fatāwā*, 6:44.

Refuge” (Q. 112:1-2).¹¹⁷ The expression “everlasting refuge” can be attributed only to He, who is worthy of being described as perfect.¹¹⁸

The second premise is that perfection cannot contain imperfection. Here Ibn Taymiyyah explains, that deducing from our world that God is this and that, is a mistake, because what we consider as perfection, cannot be applied to God. Furthermore, what we consider as imperfection actually defines perfection in God. Ibn Taymiyyah provides only one example to illustrate his point:

If we use the correct terminology, we can say that perfection is that, which does not contain imperfection. If we use the [incorrect] terminology of those who consider what is not imperfect as imperfect, [we can say] that perfection is that, which does not contain a specific traceable imperfection. In other words, one should be extremely careful when describing what is considered perfect in some creatures and imperfect in others. In any case, [there are traits that are] considered imperfect when attributed to God. For example, eating and drinking. The healthy living creature wants to eat and drink, and hence it is more perfect (*akmal*) than the sick creature, who does not wish to eat and drink, because the healthy constitution of the healthy creature depends on his eating and drinking. [The actions] which a creature, who is not entitled to be considered perfect, is capable of doing, are considered imperfect when attributed to the One, Who is perfect. Moreover, the actions [of eating and drinking] obligate that the eating and drinking creature is in constant need of something other than itself, that is, the food and drink that enter its body. This creature also requires that excrement exits its body. Therefore, whoever does not need anything to enter his body, is more perfect than whoever needs such activity. He, whose ‘perfection’ depends on something else than himself, is imperfect when compared to He, whose perfection does not depend on anything other than Himself. And so, what is considered to be perfect for the creatures is considered imperfect for the Creator.¹¹⁹

In sum, Ibn Taymiyyah establishes that there are some actions and attributes which are considered perfect for creatures, and cannot be applied to God or be attributed to Him, since His perfection makes those actions and attributes unnecessary for Him. Of course, continues Ibn Taymiyyah, there are attributes denoting perfection. These attributes are life, knowledge, power, hearing, seeing and speech.¹²⁰

Ibn Taymiyyah then describes other attributes of God that can be interpreted as imperfect. As the anonymous believer defined earlier, anger and laughter — when connected to human psychology — are considered “imperfect” attributes. Thus, these attributes may indicate a quality of neediness in God, which is unacceptable.

¹¹⁷ This is Arberry’s translation.

¹¹⁸ Ibn Taymiyyah, *Maǧmūʿat al-fatāwā*, 6:45.

¹¹⁹ Ibn Taymiyyah, *Maǧmūʿat al-fatāwā*, 6: 53–54. See a summary of this passage in Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya’s Theodicy*, 65.

¹²⁰ Ibn Taymiyyah, *Maǧmūʿat al-fatāwā*, 6: 54.

Here Ibn Taymiyyah strives to show the perfection in these attributes, but only when ascribed to God.

Whoever acts without being tired is more perfect than whoever acts and eventually gets tired. God created the heaven and earth and what lies between them in six days, without being afflicted by tiredness. On the same level, the Lord has the attribute of knowledge rather than the attribute of ignorance. He has the attribute of potency rather than the attribute of impotency. He has the attribute of life rather than the attribute of death. He has the attributes of hearing, seeing and talking rather than the attributes of deafness, blindness, and dumbness. He has the attribute of laughing rather than the attribute of crying. He has the attribute of joy rather than the attribute of sadness. And as for anger, when this is combined with satisfaction, and hate is combined with love, then it is more perfect than [the state of] the creature who has only love and satisfaction [in his heart], and is incapable of being angry and of hating the reprehensible things which should be hated and condemned.¹²¹

Ibn Taymiyyah's concept of God is a God who both loves and also is full of fury and hatred of various abominations, even directed to people He Himself created. This is in complete accordance with the Quranic message. Further on, Ibn Taymiyyah discusses laughter, when attributed to God. His goal is to prove, by using both rationalistic and textual evidence, that laughter is no less an attribute of perfection when ascribed to God.

Ibn Taymiyyah first determines that it is not correct to consider laughter as an indication of lightheadedness. He explains that when we laugh at something which is inappropriate to laugh at, then indeed the laughter is associated with lightheadedness, and thus is considered a reprehensible attribute. However, laughter "in its appropriate place" is a praiseworthy quality, which indicates perfection. Furthermore, if we take two living creatures, one of whom laughs at whatever is appropriate to laugh, and the other does not laugh at all, it is clear that the individual who laughs "is more perfect" (*akmal*) than the other.¹²²

As an example of an appropriate laughter, Ibn Taymiyyah quotes the *ḥadīth*, in which Abū Razīn asked the Prophet: "Does God really laugh?" According to Ibn Taymiyyah's systematic way of argumentation, the textual evidence is the ultimate proof. However, Ibn Taymiyyah is willing to give more evidence to demonstrate the good qualities in laughter, and more so, to prove that a laughing individual is a superior being. He points as the ideal of healthy life, the Bedouin Arab, who is considered, from as early as the times of the Prophet Muḥammad, to be living in

¹²¹ Ibn Taymiyyah, *Maǧmūʿat al-fatāwā*, 6: 57. The same idea appears in a brief passage in an epistle entitled "Al-Tadmuriyyah," which Hoover summarizes. However, in al-Tadmuriyyah, Ibn Taymiyya does not elaborate on laughter. Ibn Taymiyyah, *Maǧmūʿat al-fatāwā*, 3: 54; Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya's Theodicy*, 64.

¹²² Ibn Taymiyyah, *Maǧmūʿat al-fatāwā*, 6: 71.

the purest and most natural way that God created his creatures. The Bedouin Arab, says Ibn Taymiyyah, sees his laughter as an indication of his good conduct and good nature. Laughter, he continues, is one of the attributes of perfection (*ṣifāt kamāl*). A gloomy person, who never laughs, should be condemned.¹²³

Ibn Taymiyyah concludes his discussion with the Aristotelian definition of man:¹²⁴

Man is an animal that talks and laughs. What differentiates man from the animal is a quality of perfection. Talking is a quality of perfection, and so is laughter. Whoever laughs is more perfect than whoever does not laugh.¹²⁵

Ibn Taymiyyah here is willing to make the analogy between the human and the divine, in order to prove his point, although his defining principle is never to compare God with humans. In order to avoid the danger of deducing from the human about the divine, he adds a reservation:

However, laughter in us, [humans], is necessary because there is [always] some kind of a flaw in us. But God is infallible.¹²⁶

Finally, he concludes:

The essence of laughter is by all means not connected to any flaw, as our essences, attributes and indeed our existence, are.¹²⁷

The reservation and the conclusion correspond with Ibn Taymiyyah’s argument which argues for the complete unlikeness between God and His creation.

Ibn Taymiyyah’s argumentation for laughter is the peak of the traditionalistic method of arguing. He in fact leads the reader towards the understanding that a figurative interpretation of laughter is hardly needed in order to fully comprehend the meaning of God’s laughter in the Hadith. According to Ibn Taymiyyah, we must bear in mind that it is appropriate to attribute laughter to God. Ibn Taymiyyah comes full circle to the position of the ninth century traditionalists in rejecting any attempt to interpret God’s laughter figuratively. His well-argued paragraph on laughter actually provides a subtle rationalization for the traditionalists’ blunt demand not to inquire about God’s attributes, but to fully and literally accept the contents of the sacred texts.

¹²³ Ibn Taymiyyah, *Maǧmūʿāt al-fatāwā*, 6: 71–72.

¹²⁴ On Ibn Taymiyyah’s knowledge of Greek philosophy, see: Ibn Taymiyya, *Ibn Taymiyya against the Greek Logicians*, trans. Wael B. Hallaq (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993).

¹²⁵ Ibn Taymiyyah, *Maǧmūʿāt al-fatāwā*, 6: 71–72.

¹²⁶ Ibn Taymiyyah, *Maǧmūʿāt al-fatāwā*, 6: 72.

¹²⁷ Ibn Taymiyyah, *Maǧmūʿāt al-fatāwā*, 6: 72.

Conclusion

The *ḥadīths* on God's laughter are a part of the huge bulk of eschatological *ḥadīths*, and as such they are embedded in an atmosphere of horror and fright. However, God's laughter in these *ḥadīths* is an expression of God's grace and benevolence, which are bestowed upon the believers. God's laughter also indicates His playfulness and astonishment.

While orally transmitting these texts which describe God's laughter, the Prophet Muḥammad himself laughed. His laughter was first an illustrator of God's laughter, but it also indicated the Prophet's satisfaction of God's grace and benevolence. The use of actual laughter while transmitting the laughter—*ḥadīths* enabled the proliferation of the concept of a laughing God in both the learned circles and in the popular sermons. Nevertheless, the transmission called for a comparison between human laughter and divine laughter, which is perceived as heresy by the Islamic dogma.

God's laughter became an inseparable part of the traditionalistic dogma since the ninth century. Even so, because laughter was a disputable issue in the traditionalistic circles, the laughter-*ḥadīths* required much processing in order to settle the concept of God's laughter with the concept of a transcendent God. Moving between figurative and literal readings of the texts, the traditionalists labored to rationalize God's laughter without comparing Him to humans.

In one of his theological treatises, Ibn Qayyim al-al-Ġawziyyah rejected figurative interpretation when applied to God's attributes, and claimed that it is unsystematic and inefficient. Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyyah stated: "Whosoever interprets the [divine] laughter as the [divine] will, merely escapes from one attribute and seeks refuge in another. So why does [this reader] not acknowledge the texts as they are? Why does he violate their sanctity?"¹²⁸ Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyyah also authored a long creed, in which he states: "The Prophet described God as joyous and laughing, and that He holds the hearts of His servants between His two fingers."¹²⁹

No doubt, it was Ibn Taymiyyah's well-argued discussion about God's laughter that enabled Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyyah to reject the use of figurative interpretation, and to fully embrace the notion of God's laughter, while distancing himself from the unsophisticated literal reading which characterized the teachings of the early traditionalists.

¹²⁸ Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyyah, *Kitāb al-sawā'iq al-mursallāh 'alā al-ġahmiyyah wa-l-mu'attilah*, ed. 'Alī ibn Muḥammad al-Dahīl Allāh (Riyadh: Dār al-'Āsimah, 1998), 1:236.

¹²⁹ Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyyah, *Kitāb al-sawā'iq*, 1:220–21.

Chapter 3

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Laughter in *Beowulf*: Ambiguity, Ambivalence, and Group Identity Formation

The world of Old English literature is not one that is typically characterized by the presence of laughter, at least not on the surface. The dominant image is that of the warrior who may feast and enjoy the drinking of mead on one evening only to be at the moment of his death the next day. Such a notion tells us perhaps a great deal more about modern perceptions of life in the mead halls of Scandinavia and England than what the texts that originate from that world actually reveal. But that disparity may also be inscribed in the text as well. In the case of a text such as *Beowulf*, James Earl notes that great disparity exists between the poet and the world he imagines in terms of time, geography, governance, religion, and ethics. In a sense, the poet is already creating an archeology of an earlier culture; thus the poem may also tell us something about the world of the poet in which other social norms exist.¹ Old English literature has often been mined for its representation of material culture, particularly the form of buildings and artistic designs. It seems appropriate to see what we are able to discern about emotions and their expression in the social setting of the hall, the center of this tribal and military-based society.

What might be said about the emotional world of a Germanic past as envisioned in *Beowulf* and other Old English texts? Sadness, anger, rage, contemplation, joy, and a hundred points on the emotional compass can be observed. Not a surprise, the emotional experiences that might evoke laughter in the canon of Old English literature are relatively few, but they reveal some of the larger social patterns that

¹ James W. Earl, "Beowulf and the Origins of Civilization," *Speaking Two Languages: Traditional Disciplines and Contemporary Theory in Medieval Studies*, ed. Allen J. Frantzen. SUNY Series in Medieval Studies (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1991), 65–89.

must also have been a part of the material culture of medieval life, particularly the group identity found among military retainers. Readers may be surprised at the times and specific locations in which references to laughter occur in the literary and homiletic corpus of Old English. Susie I. Tucker and Hugh Magennis have provided scholars with a list of specific references to texts that use the Old English words translated as “laugh” or “laughter,” and Magennis has created a taxonomy of laughter in texts with the categories of joy, scorn, prosperity, and riot.² Filtered through the traditions of Germanic wisdom literature along with what must have been an implicit Christian moralizing about laughter in the context of transitory life, which is a characteristic of homiletic literature, Old English texts contain some of what might be called a theory of laughter, but it is hardly monolithic and seems to be based on momentary experiences.

Prohibitions about laughter in religious communities provide some of that theory, but it is most certainly the lived experiences of people refracted or imagined in literary texts that tell about the norms of laughter.³ Notions of religious laughter were certainly known throughout the medieval period, but laughter in a secular context meant something completely different. The question we must answer is “Should we impose on medieval texts that do not seem to be religious at least at the level of the narrative’s matrix a religious interpretive framework?” That same interpretive framework might transform the nature of the laughter to the materials in their oral state before they were written down. Perhaps other ideas about laughter deserve equal consideration with the religious domain. Medieval philosophers, and even theologians, thought that laughter was the “property of the human race.”⁴ To laugh was to be human, and when Old English texts ascribe laughter to some who seem not human or to non-living objects, clearly there is a sense of the human power bestowed momentarily on that image.⁵

The Old English *Beowulf* contains several references to laughter.⁶ Sometimes mixed with sounds which must have accompanied the merriment of Heorot, laughter becomes quite obvious at two key points that reveal the social anxieties in Danish society. The first of these occurs at the conclusion of the flyting scene between Beowulf and Unferth where Beowulf casts light on Unferth’s murder of his own kindred. The warriors in Heorot laugh at the conclusion of this complex

² Susie I. Tucker, “Laughter in Old English Literature,” *Neophilologus* 43(1959): 222–26; Hugh Magennis, “Images of Laughter in Old English Poetry, with Particular Reference to the ‘HLEAHTOR WERA’ of *The Seafarer*,” *English Studies* 73 (1992): 193–204.

³ Magennis, “Images of Laughter,” 201–04.

⁴ Helen Adolf, “On Mediaeval Laughter,” *Speculum* 22.2 (1947): 251–53.

⁵ See also the contribution to this volume by Christine Bousquet-Labou  rie.

⁶ All references to the text of *Beowulf* are to the Klaeber edition. See Friedrich Klaeber, *Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, 3rd ed. (1922; Boston, DC: Heath and Company, 1950). All translations of the poem from the Old English are mine.

scene in which Beowulf's abilities as a warrior are challenged and Unferth's own personal history is revealed. Clearly, the notion of laughter in the hall and laughter in battle was not new to the Germanic court. It was well known in the classical period, as Judith Hagen has shown, and it is multifaceted.⁷ The narrator's recording of the laughter is deeply rooted in ambivalence as we will see, and only through careful untangling of the narrative can we arrive at the direction of the laughter. The second instance of laughter involves Grendel himself as he "laughs inside" or "in his mind" while contemplating an evening of slaughter following Beowulf's arrival in Heorot. Certainly intended as a means of humanizing Grendel's description, here too the laughter is complex. The difference is that Grendel laughs alone, an anti-community laugh of sorts. Other instances of laughter in the poem are quite conventional in their usage as a reflection upon life's transience.

This essay asserts that these two key instances of laughter in *Beowulf* seen in context provide a transformative reading of the situations, and that the moments of that laughter preserve the ambivalence of reading the scenes. The conventional is both perplexing on one level and seemingly obvious on another. As we will see, laughter in the poem is anything but trivial. Laughter becomes one of the poem's most revealing keys for interpretation.

Throughout *Beowulf*, laughter is the product of community, and, as John Niles has noted, community is the overriding theme of the poem, if not of most heroic poetry.⁸ Laughter is a human expression intended to define the boundaries of actions and the emotional characterization of those experiences. While laughter is certainly not found in great abundance in *Beowulf*, when it is present, laughter marks some of the most ambiguous experiences of the poem. The only time it is not ambivalent is when it occurs in the second portion of the poem when readers are warned that with the fall of a king laughter ends for all. The notion is rather morose.⁹ Laughter highlights elements that simply cannot rise to the level of discussion in the community, even about their greatest taboos. Laughter functions to define that community as it checks the impulses that constitute that community.

⁷ See the contribution to this volume by Judith Hagen with regard to different kinds of laughter in classical militaristic settings. Since some have held that the *Beowulf* poet knew classical literature, particularly the epic, it seems possible that laughter in the poem might also have classical links.

⁸ John D. Niles, *Beowulf: The Poem and Its Tradition* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 1–24; see also Albrecht Classen's discussion of the communicative community in early medieval literature, *Verzweiflung und Hoffnung: Die Suche nach der kommunikativen Gemeinschaft in der deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters*. Beihefte zur Mediaevistik, 1 (Frankfurt a. M., Berlin, et al.: Peter Lang, 2002), 1–52.

⁹ The passage (lines 3019–20) occurs as part of Wiglaf's recounting of the events of tragedy in the land of the Geats, beginning with the death of Hygelac and now with fear of rising animosity from neighboring tribes.

Laughter focuses a light on the Danish court and its inadequacies. Contextualizing the laughter of *Beowulf* in the sphere of Germanic heroic and religious laughter suggests how defining the experience in the poem can be. Laughter tells us a great deal about moments when actions in the poem can only stand as testimonies to mystery, and it tells us about a society that arose from chaos and is on the verge of it again.

In order to understand laughter in *Beowulf* within the context of the age, we must consider the history of laughter as represented in other text traditions both religious and heroic. Then we can examine the two key passages relating to Unferth and Grendel, an interesting pairing in this poem. Laughter connects them in ambiguous ways.

I

Almost from the start of scholarly studies of *Beowulf* in the nineteenth century, there have been attempts to separate the various strands of tradition within the poem, relative to its pre-Christian and Christian materials, almost in the same way that historical-critical scholars in biblical studies have attempted to determine the oral and written documents behind the available finished texts. Such attempts have met with only marginal success in OE studies. Aspects of laughter must be understood as having both pre-Christian and Christian contexts. Since it would seem most likely that the *Beowulf* poet was a monastic—or at least the person who preserved the poem was—he would have had ample cultural materials from his own world to draw upon with respect to the meaning of laughter. Early monastic documents such as the *Rule of Saint Benedict* warn particularly of laughter that is too intense.¹⁰ Monks would have known the commonplace statement that Jesus never laughed. The *Concordia Regularum*, written by Benedict of Ananiae (late eighth to early ninth century), notes in monastic settings that laughter and joking could lead to contention within the community, an idea that Langland also considers in *Piers Plowman*, of course, written the late Middle Ages, but with the same import of ideas.¹¹

Perhaps even more revealing in early medieval commentaries regarding laughter was the notion that the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible suggested two different kinds of laughter: the laughter of the evil person, said to be hollow and

¹⁰ *The Rule of St. Benedict: In Latin and English with Notes*, trans. and ed. Timothy Fry (Collegeville, MA: Liturgical Press, 1981), 4.54. For commentary on this passage, see Sebastian Coxon, *Laughter and Narrative in the Later Middle Ages: German Comic Tales 1350–1525*. Legenda (London: Modern Humanities and Maney Publishing, 2008), 3–4.

¹¹ Coxon, *Laughter and Narrative*, 3.

empty, contrasted with the laughter of the wise and true in the writings of Gregory the Great.¹² The first kind of laughter was connected with the body, not the heart. Seen in this way, laughter became a marking feature of the wicked person. It was even permissible for the saintly person to laugh at the devil and those who were damned. In that way, laughter established boundary markers between groups.

While readers of *Beowulf* should certainly keep in mind that none of the Danes, Geats, or the Grendels are Christian, but they are sometimes given an almost Christian overlay in their discourses; thus a kind of anachronism from our perspective may be given to characters and their actions. The original audiences of the poem in its manuscript tradition would certainly have seen the laughter in the poem through multiple lenses, including the monastic that would alter the original purely Germanic understanding of the events. In a world where texts meant a great deal more than they could say, we must remember that hearers and readers would have appropriated to the text the methods of interpretation that were a part of their communities. An understanding of the poem was thus a manifestation of community's interpretation almost in the same way that the very concept of laughter in this poem defines that community and establishes its boundaries.

II

Susan Kreis provides readers of Old English and Old Norse poetry with a basic sketch of laughter. In Old English the words *hleahfor* as a noun and *ahliehhan* as a verb are typically translated as "laughter." As she observes, the terms in themselves are neutral in meaning.¹³ The word clearly has an onomatopoeic quality that suggests pleasure, a kind of *jouissance* as Žižek might term it.¹⁴ In an ironic way, even the sound of the word seems raucous with the pleasure of the sound moving beyond what is left over after the signifier has completed its work in the signification process. Laughter can thus be arresting, and the social order would desire a return to normality.

Laughter cannot ultimately be contained and bounded. It is the excess of the sound linguistically and the excess in the experience of laughter filtered through the classical and monastic contexts that rise to the level of prominence in the poem.

¹² Coxon, *Laughter and Narrative*, 4–5.

¹³ Susanne Kreis, "Laughter and Social Stability in Anglo-Saxon and Old Norse Literature," *A History of English Laughter: Laughter from Beowulf to Beckett and Beyond*, ed. Manfred Pfister. Internationale Forschungen zur allgemeinen und vergleichenden Literaturwissenschaft, 57 (Amsterdam and New York: Editions Rodopi, 2002), 1–15.

¹⁴ Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London and New York: Verso, 1989), 43–44, 121–29.

Perhaps that is also the reason that medieval religious texts attempt to control laughter. Further in her study, Kreis notes that in monastic settings, laughter was associated with a pagan past.¹⁵ Such an idea would have particular import for *Beowulf*, a text in which the Christian poet show great ambivalence toward the pagan past as he tries to find a language of accommodation to tell the story.¹⁶ Jim Earl has suggested that in *Beowulf*, there is also “mourning for the past” as a way of providing reconciliation with that age and the present.¹⁷ Laughter has some role in that intention. In *Judgment Day II*, all laughter ends on the Day of Judgment.¹⁸ In “secular” poems such as *The Seafarer* and *The Wanderer*, there are memories of the sounds of laughter in the hall, but now it is gone forever. Raucous laughter in one of the riddles is also seen as something to be avoided, almost like the laughter of the Green Knight in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.¹⁹ If these texts suggest an implicit theory of laughter drawing on classical, monastic, and Germanic strains of thought, then there is some body of knowledge that would have been available to the original poet and that first audience. These ideas might be summarized by the following statements:

1. Laughter is something that only people do. It shows cognition and will, the ability to compare ideals and realities, and the ability to see discrepancies.
2. Laughter is a sign of happiness and enjoyment.
3. Laughter should be controlled so as not to be excessive. Moderation in both the sense of gnomic wisdom and even as the golden mean can be seen in literary texts.
4. Laughter is seen both as an activity of the past and a fleeting reminder of human transience.
5. While not laughter as such, Raymond Tripp has found a number of internal puns in the poem and rhyming aspects that must have lent comedy to the poem.²⁰ This notion of laughter might have occurred with dramatic renditions of the poem by an oral poet reading to an assembled audience. Of course, this understanding can only remain speculative as the literature from this period only recalls oral renditions of mythic tales, composed of improvisation. We cannot know how an audience might respond.

Theorists of laughter such as Henri Bergson are more interested in the psycho-social manifestations of laughter related to bodily movement, repetition of action,

¹⁵ Kreis, “Laughter and Social Stability,” 2.

¹⁶ Fred C. Robinson, *Beowulf and the Appositive Style*. John C. Hodges Lecture Series (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1985), 10–13.

¹⁷ James Earl, *Thinking about Beowulf* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 132–33; Robin Norris, “Mourning Rites: *Beowulf*, the *Iliad*, and the War in Iraq,” *Journal of Narrative Theory* 37.2 (2007): 276–95 suggests similar attitudes as Earl’s earlier study in the poem.

¹⁸ Kreis, “Laughter and Social Stability,” 3.

¹⁹ Kreis, “Laughter and Social Stability,” 3.

²⁰ Raymond Tripp, “Humor, Wordplay, and Semantic Resonance in *Beowulf*,” *Humour in Anglo-Saxon Literature*, ed. Jonathan Wilcox (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2000), 49–78.

and a kind of informed knowing that relates the observed behavior to a past experience.²¹ The ritualistic elements of flyting and of Grendel's internal laugh may reflect the formalized aspects of Bergson's theory as we will see later. These elements can also aid our examination of *Beowulf* as they draw on universal and transhistorical perceptions of actions.

III

From the beginning of the poem, Heorot, the pride and joy of Hrothgar and the Danes, stands as an act of royal will. In a sense, it is a mystical place spoken into being. Into that world Grendel enters, throwing the Danes into their equivalent 9/11 moment. He holds sway in the hall for 12 years. Unferth, upon first meeting Beowulf, seems to be the voice of the Danish past. There is in a sense more than one scop in the hall. During the later feasting scenes, the official scop busies the air with the story of Sigemund the Dragon Slayer and the Finn/Hnæf/Hildeburh episode. No doubt these stories are mythic in their scope and reveal a rather unflattering side of contemporary Danish court society. They reveal a people who were once able to stand against outside forces but now are reduce in their abilities. These are stories of a noble Danish past, the remainder of which Unferth is the most likely inheritor in the world of tale telling.

Unferth, following the traditions associated with flyting, tells a story that has been circulating about Beowulf—his fool hearty swimming match with Breca in their youth. Many scholars have investigated the telling and retelling of this story of Beowulf's youth in terms of its rhetorical strategies and truth claims. On one level, it is a telling that is supposed to discredit Beowulf. On another level, the telling and retelling are related to the whole nature of story-telling among Germanic peoples. It is impossible to tell which story—Unferth's or Beowulf's—is accurate, or even if accuracy is the mode of operation necessary at this moment. Before telling the first story of Beowulf and Breca, the poet in lines 501 writes that Unferth “onband beadurune” (unbound battle runes). Klaeber glosses the moment with the expression “commenced fight.”²² The narrator suggests the reason for Unferth's anger relates to his fear of being upstaged by anyone, but there is little in the poem to suggest that Unferth is capable of heroic deeds. Therein lies the implicit irony of his verbal attack. The narrator notes that Unferth “æt fot sæt frean Scyldinga” (500; sat at the feet of the lord of the Scyldings). Such a position is significant. Clearly, if Unferth had said something of which Hrothgar disapproved,

²¹ Henri Bergson, *Le Rire: Essai sur la Signification du Comique* (1900; Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1960).

²² Klaeber, *Beowulf*, 302.

he would have been within physical distance to stop his barrage of words. Instead at the end of the encounter, the narrator uses the words “on salum” (607; happiness) to suggest the state of Hrothgar at the outcome of the exchange.

The question remains, “Was this experience a setup for Hrothgar, Unferth, or Beowulf?” Ward Parks, in comparing the flytings in *The Odyssey* and *Beowulf*, suggests that “Hrothgar has authority over the contest in that warrior must apparently secure at least his tacit consent before undertaking it.”²³ Further, he observes that Unferth’s challenge is not a direct “man-against-man” contest as in a “battlefield contest pattern” as in *The Odyssey*; nevertheless, it is an attack on Beowulf’s judgment and valor.²⁴ A. L. Ridsen and Carol Clover have found quite a number of parallels of flyting in Old Norse literature to a similar effect.²⁵ Since reason is associated with masculinity, it is also possible to see that Unferth has challenged Beowulf’s masculine status. If this experience is a matter of Danish statescraft, it does show that Beowulf in his retort to Unferth further underlines his intention to defeat Grendel.²⁶

John M. Hill has observed that Unferth’s attack is a kind of “oral feasting” in which “he voices Danish ambivalence toward the powerful stranger and group pride.”²⁷ How one understands this scene has a great deal to do with the presence of laughter which appears to close out the encounter.

Beowulf takes the story which Unferth tells, and he reshapes it to his own verbal advantage. The telling allows others to know of Beowulf’s victory over the water monsters at the bottom of the sea. This is hardly the Beowulf of fool-hardiness and defeat. He may still be fool-hearty, but his show of strength carries the day. Our concerns here are more related to Beowulf’s pointed remarks to Unferth, the reaction that evokes laughter in the hall. Beowulf says:

No ic wiht fram þe
 swylcra searoniða secgan hyrde
 billa brogan. Breca næfre git
 æt heaðlace, ne gehwæper incer,
 swa deorlice dæd gefremede
 fagum sweordum —no ic þæs [fela] gylpe—,

²³ Ward Parks, *Verbal Dueling in Heroic Narrative: The Homeric and Old English Traditions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 74–75.

²⁴ Parks, *Verbal Dueling in Heroic Narrative*, 75.

²⁵ A. L. Ridsen, “Heroic Humor in *Beowulf*,” *Humour in Anglo-Saxon Literature*, ed. Jonathan Wilcox (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2000), 71–78; Carol J. Clover, “The Germanic Context of the Unferth Episode,” *Speculum* 55 (1980): 444–68.

²⁶ Parks, *Verbal Dueling in Heroic Narrative*, 75.

²⁷ John M. Hill, *The Cultural World in Beowulf*. Anthropological Horizons (Toronto and London: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 78. Hill’s study provides the most extended analysis of the poem along anthropological and psychological lines in recent times.

pæh ðu þinum broðrum te banan wurde,
 heafodmægum; þæs þu in helle scealt
 werhðo dreogan, þeah þin wit duge.

[Never have I heard anything about you
 such contest concerning tell,
 sword-terror. Breca never yet
 at sword-battle nor you yet
 such a bold deed have done
 with a decorated sword —never would I boast much of it—
 though you your brother's killer became,
 a near relative; for that you in hell needs will
 endure punishment, though your wits are good.]²⁸
 (581b–89)

Without question, these are daring words on Beowulf's part. In this case, Beowulf has told a story first, and there is no come back from Unferth. The assumption must be that Beowulf has told the truth. He has reached deeply into the psychological make-up of the Danish court. Since Germanic law, even from the time of the poem's supposed origin of the story in its oral form, had condemned the killing of kindred, the relation of this incident raises questions about why Unferth is here. He should have been banished from court. Admittedly the entire poem is riddled with examples of fratricide in both the Danish and Geatish courts, but here it has risen to the level of a charge. A. L. Ridsen suggests that Beowulf's reference to fratricide here links Unferth and Grendel and that Beowulf "may kill Hunferth as well as Grendel, should he need to."²⁹ Such humor would certainly have an ironic grimness, but it would not be lost on a group of Germanic warriors seated at a feast boasting over their many accomplishments for a military lord. Knowing how to move forward, Beowulf finishes his speech with his announced purpose to attack Grendel.

The poem next relates that the tensions were resolved in an intriguing way:

Pa wæs on salum since brytta
 gamolfeax ond guðrof; geoce gelyfde
 brego Beorht-Dena; gehyrde on Beowulfe
 folces hyrde fæstrædne geþoht.
 Pær wæs hæleþa hleahtor, hlyn swynsode,
 word wæron wynsume.
 [Then was in happiness the dispenser of treasure,
 the grey-haired and famous one in battle; in help he counted on

²⁸ It is possible that the word "helle" may actually be "halle," given that "hell" is not in the original manuscript, but in a transcription of it.

²⁹ Ridsen, "Heroic Humor in *Beowulf*," 74.

the lord of the Bright Danes; he heard in Beowulf
 the folk's guardian, firm resolution.
 There was laughter of warriors, cheerful sound,
 words were joyous.] (607–12a)

The particular phrasing is interesting and revealing of the hall mentality. Edward Irving has suggested that the incident regarding Unferth may be true, but that it would be inappropriate to bring up the matter except in a flyting.³⁰ If he is correct, then the world of the Danes is even more complex; they choose to hide some of the most sinister aspects of their collective lives under a linguistic text. Beowulf has brought the failures to the surface. The responses of Hrothgar's hearth companions could be interested in two ways. Hrothgar seems pleased; no words are said, and life resumes its normal course of laughter in the hall amidst drinking and sharing.

The laughter is not qualified as forced or directed at anyone. First, it serves as a boundary for getting back to more important matters—matters that show a lack of concern for the real problems in Heorot. *Beowulf* is not a poem of deep introspection; it is a poem of action. The placement of the laughter at this point may suggest a lack of judgment. Second, perhaps for some, it could be a moment to focus on the foolishness of Unferth, but there is nothing to suggest the laughter is one of superiority of members of Heorot over Unferth. Crafting the poem in this way, the poet allows the laughter to suggest a kind of “business as usual” that reveals the cracks in the Danish ideals. Linger on the brink of chaos, they are more locked in the world of myth and story. The poet thus in a gesture allows the men of Heorot to share Unferth's crime. The laugh here is the laughter of the pagan past, the laughter in the hall that we already know will burn with fire in a future outside the scope of the poem. Here laughter is transient, tinged with some darker elements of implicit judgment. Because laughter is locked in ambivalence, the poet's inclusion of it at this point may serve his larger purposes in the poem simultaneously to bring to the fore and pushing to the back the internal problems that underlie the Danish court.

IV

Perhaps more sinister is the laugh within the mind of Grendel when he arrives at Heorot later that same evening. In what might well be the poet's attempt to psychologize Grendel based on movement and physiological aspects of body, including the fire in his eyes, the poet writes after Grendel enters the hall:

³⁰ Edward Irving, *Rereading Beowulf*. Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989), 42–43.

Geseah he in recede rinca manige,
 swefan sibbegedriht samod ætgædere,
 magorinca heap. Ða his mod ahlog;
 mynte þæt he gedælde, ær þon dæg cwome,
 atol aglæca anra gehwylces
 lif wið lice, þa him alumpen wæs
 wistfylle wen.

[He saw in the hall many a warrior,
 sleeping a band of kinsmen together,
 a large company of young warriors. Then he laughed in his mind;
 thought that he would divide, before day came,
 the horrid demon, of each man
 life from the body, when to him befell
 expectation of the fill of feasting.] (728–34a)

The phrase “Ða his mod ahlog” (730)—“then he laughed in his mind” is a telling one on several levels. First, it suggests that Grendel is a human—or human-like—because only humans can laugh, according to classical and monastic theory. That the location of the mental laugh is one associated with rationality is also significant. In “Caedmon’s Hymn,” God has “modgeþanc” (a mind plan) and in *The Battle of Maldon*, Brithnoth’s folly springs from his “ofermod” (the pride in his mind). In terms of medieval sign theory, signification is very clearly tied to the process of cognition which lies in the mind. In the early Middle Ages, it seems that it was from the Church Fathers through the writings of Augustine that notions of cognition were “popularized.” The theory of mind, seeing it as a tripartite structure mirroring the Trinity, was discussed at length in Augustine’s *De Trinitate*.³¹ What appears more relevant here is that memory, will, and understanding are only marginally developed in the narrator’s understanding of action. Clearly, in terms of memory, Grendel has already established the mental structure of the Heorot landscape that would allow him to be victorious. After all, he has continued his reign of terror for 12 years, and his attacks are repeated multiple times. In terms of will, the narrator even speculates that his intention is to take life from the body of all present. If our poet is as familiar with Augustinian thought as we may imagine, he would place greater attention on the will as the driving force of human agency and action. Thus by characterizing Grendel as possessing a “mod” (mind), he momentarily moves him into the domain of the human. But as with Brithnoth, he too has a kind of “ofermod” that will result in

³¹ Augustine, *De Trinitate, Later Works of St. Augustine*. The Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1955). For a survey of ideas on early medieval psychology, see Simon Kemp, *Medieval Psychology*. Contributions in Psychology, 14. (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990), 1–22.

his own end. His laugh, while not verbal, is fiendish, and thus read through a monastic prism, condemns his actions from the start.

If the first instance of laughter occurs in the hall of Heorot, we find a private laugh with Grendel. Kreis is correct in asserting that this laugh is a “lonely laughter [that] is contrasted with the harmonious laughter collective characterizing the band of retainers and their lord.”³² I would assert, however, that more is happening here.

Unlike the laughter in the hall, this is a silent laugh—it is a cognitive act—perhaps the seat of the external laughter that we see earlier, unless laughter is itself an unconscious act. The poet, however, sees this mind laugh as intentional. It is one based on repeated action—usually according to Bergson, the laughter of an observer who is seeing an action repeated for the second, third, fourth, or hundredth time by someone else. This laughter is an act of will, a bold assertion and catalyst to action. It is also the laughter of superiority, based on physical strength and bodily posture. Grendel is standing; the men are lying down on the floor or on mead benches. He is invulnerable, they, quite vulnerable. Grendel, at least according to the poet, has a plan. Such a plan will be thwarted during the attack by Beowulf who severely injures Grendel, wrenching his arm and shoulder from his body. If Unferth’s words are an attempt to debase or anger Beowulf earlier that same evening, Grendel’s laughter of the mind is the precursor to his strategy to assert his continuing superiority over the people who are in the hall that evening. That the poet associates laughter with both Unferth and Grendel in some way is also intriguing.

In the entire poem, laughter only occurs three times, either as a noun or verb, associated with the natural activity of the hall, the mental laugh of cognition, and the notion that laughter ends with death. The poet, probably a Christian monk, particularly if we contend that the sermon that he gives to Hrothgar during the celebration of Beowulf’s defeat of Grendel’s mother uses imagery from the texts of Gregory the Great,³³ is likely influenced by a vision of life that sees laughter as transitory, especially pagan laughter. Grendel’s laugh is a momentary one; the laughter in the hall is also fleeting; the laughter of the military lord ends with his death. At the same time, those who are laughing are inscribed in texts that show the ambivalence of their laughter, if not also the ironic impact of the gesture.

The *Beowulf* poet certainly depicts the world of the hall in the first portion of the poem before Beowulf’s return to his homeland as one in which various kinds of laughter occur. What seems clear is that from the perspective of the poet, the

³² Kries, “Laughter and Social Stability,” 7.

³³ Exegetical critics were among the first to note the poet’s verbal parallels between Hrothgar’s words and the writings of Gregory the Great. See Margaret E. Goldsmith, *The Mode and Meaning of Beowulf* (London: Athlone Press, 1970).

person who maintains ultimate control over his text even in an overdetermined way, laughter signals a kind of failure. Since, however, he is also telling a story that he inherited, there is also a kind of text logic about laughter that he passes along to his audience perhaps unaware—texts do have a life of their own, and authors may not control every aspect in those texts; nor can the communities that create them. The laughter in Heorot following the flyting of Unferth concerning Beowulf may mark the end of the event, but it is also ambivalent. Are the people laughing because they are drunk just as Unferth is drunk? Are they laughing because Beowulf has put Unferth in his place in a way they all understand but cannot talk about? Readers may never know. That they laughed is the important point, but it lies beyond the point where the text can provide clues. Grendel's laugh as a precursor to his own demise suggests that laughter, as with pride noted later in the poem, begins in the mind and radiates out in actions. The ambivalence comes from the fact that Grendel laughs for one reason, and the poet suggests through his actions just how vexed those intentions are. Finally, since the fall of a lord in battle ends his laughter and mirth, laughter is the harbinger of the end. In that sense, laughter participates in an almost apocalyptic mode. When people laugh in *Beowulf*, we should take note. There are only a few times, but they provide significant keys into the narrative logic of the poet and the shadowy world of human behavior that the poet is trying to re-present to his later audience.

Chapter 4

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The *Parodia sacra* Problem and Medieval Comic Studies

“And why does one laugh at a negro?”

—Henri Bergson

If a critical consensus has crystallized around the theme common to the essays in this volume it is that laughter is a funny thing. It is almost impossible to say anything broad about the topic without recourse to oppositions, paradoxes, and even apparent contradictions. The laughing person either draws others in warmly to share in the mirth or pushes them away sardonically, judgmentally, and derisively.¹ What is funny to me might not be funny to you, and what was funny to me last night may no longer be funny to me this morning. Certain things deemed amusing by Henri Bergson and his Parisian contemporaries as recently as the 1890s are no longer predictably risogenic, to say the least, yet comic works of five and six hundred years earlier can still leave modern readers in stitches.² Some

¹ A number of languages acknowledge this lexically by distinguishing playful from mocking laughter: thus *ridere* versus *irridere* or *deridere* in Latin, *gelan* versus *katagelan* in Greek, *z'hok* versus *laag* in Hebrew, and so on.

² Examples include Chaucer's and Boccaccio's works. The epigraph appears in Bergson's *Le Rire*, originally published in 1899. Bergson's unsettling “negro” example (“Pourquoi rit-on d'un nègre?”) is slipped in among others to illustrate the work's famous theory of the comic as “du mécanique plaqué sur du vivant” (29), and racial difference is treated, unacceptably by current standards, as a subcategory of disguise and of perceived temporary deviation from the norm. Henri Bergson, *Le Rire: Essai sur la signification du comique* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1995), 31. For a case study on the underlying point of the period-specific nature of the comic, see Karl Bertau, “Versuch über Tote Witze bei Wolfram,” *Wolfram von Eschenbach: Neun Versuche über Subjektivität und Ursprünglichkeit in der Geschichte* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1983), 60–109. I thank Prof.

religious traditions embrace laughter, making of it a cosmic force of divine creativity, while others shun it, associating it with forces of evil; Christianity in particular has been famously unable over the centuries to speak in one voice on the topic. In other words, laughter is caught in a dialectic of identification versus alienation, it is highly context-dependent in expression despite being a human universal in production, and it is variously associated with either the highest and most ethereal aspects of the spirit or the lowest bodily pulsions.³ Already in Aristotle's works laughter receives three distinct classificatory treatments in three different works: low and uncouth in the *Poetics*; acceptable and even desirable, provided it be measured, in the *Nichomachean Ethics*; and as a purely physiological phenomenon divorced from any particular social meaning in *On the Parts of Animals*.⁴ This polysemousness, not to say extreme ambivalence, continues to the

Albrecht Classen for this reference. Further examples of the inaccessibility to today's readers of late-medieval and early-modern humorous theatrical texts (*sotties*, specifically) are examined in Lia B. Ross's contribution to this volume.

- ³ I am far from being the first observer to emphasize the dialectical quality of laughter. "Laughter can serve as a bond to bring people together or as a weapon to humiliate and ostracize its victims," writes Robert R. Provine in *Laughter: A Scientific Investigation* (New York: Penguin, 2000), 2. In a similar vein, the Russian critic M.I. Steblin-Kamenskij distinguishes between the basic categories of "directed" (i.e., scornful) laughter and "non-directed" (i.e., innocent) laughter in "On the History of Laughter," *Mediaeval Scandinavia* 11 (1978–1979), 154–62. Already in his 1855 laughter essay Charles Baudelaire situated humankind between two Pascalian infinities in writing that since laughter "is essentially human, it is also essentially contradictory, that is to say it is at once a sign of infinite grandeur and of infinite wretchedness" (the first in comparison to the animal world and the second in comparison to the idea of God). "The Essence of Laughter and More Especially of the Comic in Plastic Arts," trans. Gerard Hopkins, *The Essence of Laughter and Other Essays, Journals, and Letters*, ed. Peter Quennell (New York: Meridian, 1956), 117. A noteworthy assessment of laughter's "double-sided character" has recently been formulated as follows: laughter "exists at the interface, so to speak, between body and mind, between instinct and intention. Though by definition inarticulate (i.e., non-linguistic), it is nonetheless a means of communication (i.e. often *paralinguistic*) and can be far-reaching in the attitudes and values it embodies. Though often resistant to cognitive understanding, it is woven into ordinary life in ways which entangle it with such fundamental concerns as sex, religion, ethnicity, politics, food and drink. Though typically fugacious in its vocal and facial manifestations, it can function as a highly charged medium of personal and social relationships. Though sometimes involuntary, it can be either encouraged or inhibited not just according to individual inclination but under the influence of education, mores and ideology." Stephen Halliwell, *Greek Laughter: A Study of Cultural Psychology from Homer to Early Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 5.
- ⁴ In the *Poetics*, the ridiculous is linked to *aiskhròs*—ugliness or badness—and agents beneath our level of goodness, as Aristotle puts it (1448a). See Richard Andrews, *Scripts and Scenarios: The Performance of Comedy in Renaissance Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 208. Compare the *Nichomachean Ethics*, Book IV, chapter 8: "Those who carry humour to excess are thought to be vulgar buffoons, striving after humour at all costs, and aiming rather at raising a laugh than at saying what is becoming and avoiding pain to the object of their fun; while those who can neither make a joke themselves nor put up with those who do are thought to be boorish and unpolished. But those who joke in a tasteful way are called ready-witted . . ." *The Basic Works*

present day in American society, with laughter and amusement viewed as either the regrettable accoutrements of a late modern culture of entertainment less and less capable of reasoned discourse or, conversely, as underappreciated therapeutic tools for combating the ills endemic to the same debilitating modern society.⁵

To venture to comment on the laughter of distant eras is to confront with pressing urgency these and other similar questions. By one well-known medieval definition, namely Dante's, the comic had nothing to do with the category of the amusing. Laughter itself has nothing to do with the amusing in its oldest forms of ritualistic, cultic, or purely reflexive production. And some instances of the medieval amusing, far from evoking modern laughter, seem to revel in an alienating crudity and cruelty that test the recuperative exegetical skills of the most competent current-day readers, such as the Haute Dame de Paris episode of Rabelais's *Pantagruel*, the dubiously hilarious *Judensau* iconography, or some of the more virulent misogynistic traditions, all of which are investigated by contributors to this volume. What are we to make of these invitations to laughter?

To Johan Huizinga the answer was clear: the later medieval world was one of clashing contrasts—a time of “blood and roses”—in which great refinement and subtlety coexisted with unspeakable violence and cruelty. How else, he wondered, could one explain cases of dwarf wrestling and blind beggar bashing clearly relished as amusing spectator sport in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Europe?⁶ Some earlier medieval works are equally cringe-inducing to modern readers, such as the repeated *Roman de Renart* gag in which the victim of the fox's tricks is described as being in agony from a mangled paw caught in a trap as the trickster

of Aristotle, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 1941), 1000. As for *On the Parts of Animals*, the famous dictum that laughter is unique to human beings comes in a very staid and technical description in Book III, Chapter 10 of how the diaphragm shields our cognitive faculties from a miasma of fumes welling up from our lower bodily organs. For useful contextualization of this famous passage, see *On the Parts of Animals*, trans. James G. Lennox (Oxford: Clarendon, 2001), 69–70; Halliwell, *Greek Laughter*, 1; and M. A. Screech and Ruth Calder, “Some Renaissance Attitudes to Laughter,” *Humanism in France*, ed. A. H. T. Levi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1970), 216–28.

⁵ Compare, for example, Neil Postman's *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (New York: Penguin, 1985), with a book from the therapeutic laughter movement such as Annette Goodheart's *Laughter Therapy: How to Laugh About Everything in Your Life That Isn't Really Funny* (Santa Barbara: Less Stress Press, 1994) or Allen Klein's *The Courage to Laugh: Humor, Hope, and Healing in the Face of Death and Dying* (New York: Tarcher/Putnum, 1998).

⁶ Johan Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages: A Study of the Forms of Life, Thought and Art in France and the Netherlands in the XIVth and XVth Centuries* (1919; Garden City: Doubleday, 1954), 26–27. For a highly skillful refutation of the assumption that medievals directed cruel humor against the blind, see Jonathan Beck, “The Blind Reading the Blind: From *Le garçon et l'aveugle* (1281) to *Blindness and Insight* (1981),” *C'est la fin pour quoy sommes ensemble: Hommage à Jean Dufournet. Littérature, histoire et langue du Moyen Âge*, ed. Jean-Claude Aubailly. 3 vols. Nouvelle Bibliothèque du Moyen Âge, 25 (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1993), 1:163–73.

scampers off joyfully.⁷ Nor does the corpus of the *fabliaux* appear as one of innocuous humor to all commentators; the translator of one 1970s *fabliaux* collection put the issue this way: "In our selection [of works], characters are successively blinded, disfigured, thrashed, thrown on to a dung-heap, pursued with knives, cudgeled, raped, castrated, waylaid, brained, crushed to death and trapped in a pit. To the medieval audience misfortune is funny, physical discomfort hilarious."⁸

On the other hand, other medieval narratives, including some that depict grave bodily harm, still speak to a general consensus of comic appreciation. Between the outlandish verve of Chaucer's *Miller's Tale*, the timeless generational rebellion that drives *Aucassin et Nicolette*, the witty parody of hagiography in the first tale of the *Decameron*, the sly derailing of a pious line of Biblical piety in the Archpoet's Goliardic Confession, and the burlesque hilarity of the sign-language debate that opens Juan Ruiz's *Book of Good Love*, almost any current-day reader can find comic delight in the medieval laughter corpus. In these moments the centuries collapse and we feel ourselves communing with the spirits of the past. "I began with the desire to speak with the dead" is the opening line of one of the most widely read works of Anglo-American literary criticism of the past thirty years; evidence suggests that we secretly long to laugh with them as well.⁹ If we are to believe Ernst Robert Curtius, the recurrence of two timeless comic motifs in the medieval

⁷ *Le Roman de Renart*, ed. Armand Strubel (Paris: Gallimard, 1998), 433.

⁸ B. J. Levy, *Selected Fabliaux* (Hull: University of Hull Department of French, 1978), vi.

⁹ Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 1. Some medievalists, it should be pointed out, deny the possibility of any penetration of the hermetic because vanished world of medieval comic sensibility; see, for example, Armand Strubel, "Le Rire au Moyen Age," *Précis de littérature française du Moyen Age*, ed. Daniel Poirion (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1983), 186–87. See also Anatoly Liberman's related argument that "people learned to laugh at verbal jokes only a few centuries ago" in "A Laughing Teuton," *Across the Oceans: Studies from East to West in Honor of Richard K. Seymour*, ed. Irmengard Rauch and Cornelia Moore (Honolulu: College of Languages, Linguistics and Literature, University of Hawaii, 1995), 133–50; here 146, and M. Louis Cazamian's views as refuted by J. S. P. Tatlock in "Mediaeval Laughter," *Speculum* 21 (1946): 289–94; here 290. These radically disjunctive stances are unconvincing and belied by the fact that quite a few jokes of the oldest surviving joke books, collections such as the late classical *philogelos* and the witticisms of the Desert Fathers, could easily be delivered to enthusiastic reception by current humor professionals. See Mary Beard, "What Made the Greeks Laugh?," *Times Literary Supplement* 5525 (20 February 2009): 3–5, and Piero Gribaudi, *Bons mots et facéties des Pères du désert* (Paris: OEIL, 1987). See also a classic of the medieval alterity debate, Hans Robert Jauss, "The Alterity and Modernity of Medieval Literature," *New Literary History* 10 (1979): 181–229 (orig. in id., *Alterität und Modernität der mittelalterlichen Literatur* [Munich: Fink, 1977]).

literary corpus—"kitchen humor" (i.e., food funniness) and involuntary nudity—should enable considerably the expression of this desire.¹⁰

The critical commonplace emphasizing the dual nature of laughter reception—what I am labeling the dialectic of identification versus alienation—should thus be expanded beyond laughter in the abstract to include the reception of comic works across time.¹¹ That is to say, a given instance of medieval joking perceived as successfully humoristic at the moment of its creation may age well, still enthralling readers of later eras, or may age very poorly as evidenced by a reception hundreds of years later marked by cringing alienation (in the case of "directed" laughter) or simple bafflement (for its "non-directed" form).¹² Most surviving artifacts of the medieval culture of laughter currently fall by common consent into one or the other of these camps: Chaucer's and Boccaccio's works today enjoy broad general recognition as laughter-inducing masterpieces (despite the fact that late in life both authors distanced themselves from the dangerous frivolity of the same works), whereas a common type of medieval humor directed against the marginalized or powerless, such as carnival violence or the *Judensau* motif treated in Birgit Wiedl's contribution to this volume, is relegated by understandable norms of acceptability to the alienation side of the equation.

This article maintains that there is one particularly noteworthy exception to this rule, namely the form of medieval humor involving instances of mimicry of religious ritual and belief to which the phrase *parodia sacra* has come to be affixed. Not only is the history of the term much less straightforward than most users of it seem to realize, but it masks a fascinating tale of our own dualistic relationship, by turns attracted and put off in equal measure, with the complex problem of laughter in the face of the divine or with the trappings of the holy. Was there such a phenomenon? Does the term have any medieval currency, or is it a modern invention? Should users care either way? Can its entry into the critical lexicon be traced, and if so, are there key turning points in its usage over time, especially regarding the dialectic of identification versus alienation? What is its relevance to

¹⁰ Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. Willard R. Trask (1948; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), 431–33. See also the contribution to this volume by Sarah Gordon.

¹¹ I mean "critical commonplace" in a neutral rather than a pejorative sense. I have in mind not just the sources cited in note 3, but also Freud's distinction between "innocent" ("*harmlosen*") and "tendentious" ("*tendenziösen*") jokes made in chapter 3 of *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, as well as Paul Lehmann's similar distinction between "cheerful" ("*erheiternde*") and "belligerent, triumphal" ("*streitende und triumphierende*") parody. See Lehmann, *Die Parodie im Mittelalter* (Munich: Drei Masken, 1922), 43.

¹² In Steblin-Kamenskij's terms, as in footnote 3.

the broader investigation of laughter in the face of the divine? And then to the existence or not of a medieval culture of laughter?

These are the specific questions that I aim to answer in the following pages, beginning with an analysis of Mikhail Bakhtin's usage and working backwards and forwards chronologically from there into the lesser-known nooks and crannies of critical reception of the phenomenon. My findings can be summarized as follows: *parodia sacra* existed neither linguistically nor conceptually in the medieval period; the term began to be used at the end of the sixteenth century to describe the exact opposite phenomenon of what Bakhtin had in mind (that is, reworking a profane original to sacred ends); and our current notion of *parodia sacra* arose in several stages over a fifty-year period beginning in the later nineteenth century through an improbable congruence of scientific codification of the study of religion and simple textual misreadings and misrepresentation. Most important, the phenomenon of laughter produced in the presence of the sacred or through mimicry of holy ritual has for centuries elicited conflicting reactions in the West, and to the extent that they are outgrowths of his theory of *parodia sacra* Bakhtin's well known concepts of dialogism and carnival may profitably be viewed as colored and shaped by—if not actually rooted in—this age-old dialectic of identification and alienation inherent in a certain type of laughter discourse.

A considerable amount of critical commentary has amassed around the striking phenomenon observable in many pre-modern cultures of seemingly free-wheeling mockery made of the trappings of religious rite and ritual.¹³ By far the best-known writings on this topic are Bakhtin's, and as anyone familiar with the term knows, *parodia sacra* inevitably brings to mind several of his seminal studies. Bakhtin uses the Latin term twelve times in three widely-cited works: twice in his book on Dostoevsky, four times in his study of Rabelais, and in six instances in the essay

¹³ In addition to the works cited later in this essay, see Mahadev L. Apte, *Humor and Laughter: An Anthropological Approach* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), 151–76; Roger Cailliois, *Man and the Sacred*, trans. Meyer Barash (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 97–127; V. A. Kolve, *The Play Called Corpus Christi* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1966), ch. 6 ("Religious Laughter"), 124–44; Harvey Gallagher Cox, *The Feast of Fools: A Theological Essay on Festivity and Fantasy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969); Ingvild Sælid Gilhus, *Laughing Gods, Weeping Virgins: Laughter in the History of Religion* (London: Routledge, 1997); M. Conrad Hyers, ed., *Holy Laughter: Essays on Religion in the Comic Perspective* (New York: Seabury Press, 1969); Jacques Le Goff, *Un Autre Moyen Âge* (Paris: Gallimard, 1999), 1343–68; Guiseppe Mazzotta, *Dante's Vision and the Circle of Knowledge* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), ch. 11 ("Theologia ludens"), 219–41; Vladimir Propp, *On the Comic and Laughter*, ed. and trans. Jean-Patrick Debbeche and Paul Perron (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009); Salomon Reinach, "Le Rire rituel," *Cultes, Mythes et Religions* 4 (1912): 109–29. For a rare volume of essays devoted exclusively to the religious parody question, see *Le Discours religieux, son sérieux, sa parodie en théologie et en littérature: Actes du colloque international de Metz, juin 1999*, ed. Pierre-Marie Beaude and Jacques Fantino (Paris: Cerf; Metz: Université de Metz, Centre de recherche pensée chrétienne, 2001).

known to English speakers as "From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse."¹⁴ The first two works were instrumental in disseminating Bakhtin's notion of carnival and carnivalization, whereas the last contains an essential statement of his theory of dialogism and linguistic hybridity.

It is impossible to overstate the influence and impact these two sets of concepts had on later twentieth-century literary and cultural criticism, especially in the Anglo-American tradition.¹⁵ If there is one blessed conceptual child that has soared on the wings of fabulous fame and fortune far beyond its humble origins in medieval studies it is *parodia sacra*. Since Bakhtin's theories of dialogism and the carnivalesque rank among the most consequential paradigms of any kind devised over the past half-century of literary and cultural criticism and since *parodia sacra*, as noted above, is a key building block in the edifice of both, there seems to be reason enough to subject the term to the kind of scrutiny that it has heretofore managed to avoid. The fact that such an inspection will reveal that our conceptual category of *parodia sacra* has a surprising amount to say about our understanding of a certain type of laughter production is all the more reason to make the effort.

Parodia sacra is generally understood today as a catch-all term designating a wide range of comic imitative reuse, in either Latin or the vernacular, of the material of religious devotion, whether originally expressed textually, liturgically, homiletically, or ritualistically, as found in a great variety in the surviving

¹⁴ *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (1965; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 14, 15, 77, 134; *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson (1963; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 127, 130; "From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse," *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (1975; Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 41–83; here 71, 75 (twice), 76, and 77 (twice). The corresponding pages in the Russian editions show exactly the same use of Latin phrases enclosed in quotation marks as in the standard English translations. Cf. for *Rabelais and His World* (more faithfully, *François Rabelais and the Folk Culture of the Middle Ages and Renaissance*), pages 18, 19, 87, and 147 of the 1965 original; for *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, pages 169/146 and 173/150 of the 1963/1979 original editions; for "From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse," pages 435, 438, and 440 of the 1975 original.

¹⁵ One citation illustrating my point: "Bakhtin's concepts of heteroglossia and carnivalization are useful here. The first suggests that novelized discourse is polyvalent, riddled with 'unofficial' voices contesting, subverting, and parodying dominant discourses, while the second suggests that the emergence in writing of these unofficial voices has the revolutionary potential to expose the arbitrary nature of official constructions of the real." Jean E. Howard, "The New Historicism in Renaissance Studies," *Renaissance Historicism*, ed. Arthur F. Kinney and Dan S. Collins (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1987), 20, cited in Joshua Levinson, "Upside-Down World," *Jerusalem Studies in Hebrew Literature* 14 (1993): 7–29; here 28.

medieval record.¹⁶ A representative example of the use of the term can be seen in a recent general handbook on parody that stresses the wide range of specific forms the practice has taken over time, with “medieval *parodia sacra* or parody of sacred texts” enumerated third in a sequence of six codified subgenres stretching from Aristophanes to postmodernism.¹⁷

In the past dozen years alone the term *parodia sacra* has been evoked as germane or indispensable to studies devoted to the following subjects: eighteenth-century English religion and esthetics, Mark Twain’s re-use of religious forms, court ceremony in seventeenth-century Russia, festive literature in seventeenth-century Spain, a fifteen-hundred-year-old Rabbinic portrayal of the Roman Emperor Titus, a three-thousand-year-old depiction of a Sumerian god laid low by a tortoise bite to the Achilles tendon, nineteenth-century Russian philosophy, thirteenth-century vernacular musical production, the appropriation of Koranic verses to magical ends, medieval allegorical exegesis of the *Song of Songs*, and the characteristics of the literary works produced by the American deaf community.¹⁸

These studies all make obligatory mention of Bakhtin, and whether they treat the term as his own coinage or (more problematically and less justifiably) of medieval currency, *parodia sacra* has most assuredly acquired a recognizable meaning and

¹⁶ In perhaps his most concise definition of the notion, Bakhtin speaks of “a never-ending folkloric dialogue: the dispute between a dismal sacred word and a cheerful folk word” (Bakhtin, “Prehistory,” 76). The more overtly jovial portions of the *Carmina Burana* would be a good widely-recognized example of what he has in mind.

¹⁷ Simon Denith, *Parody* (London: Routledge, 2000), 21.

¹⁸ Works referred to, in order: Ronald Paulson, *Hogarth’s Harlot: Sacred Parody in Enlightenment England* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), xv; Joe B. Fulton, *The Reverend Mark Twain: Theological Burlesque, Form, and Content* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2006), 89; Ernest A. Zitser, *The Transfigured Kingdom: Sacred Parody and Charismatic Authority at the Court of Peter the Great* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), 4, n. 10; Luc Torres, *Discours festif et parodie dans La Pícara Justina de Francisco López de Úbeda* (Villeneuve d’Ascq: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2002), 51; Joshua Levinson, “‘Tragedies Naturally Performed’: Fatal Charades, Parodia Sacra, and the Death of Titus,” in *Jewish Culture and Society Under the Christian Roman Empire*, ed. Richard Kalmin and Seth Schwartz (Leuven: Peeters Press, 2003), 349–82; here 367; Bendt Alster, “Ninurta and the Turtle: On Parodia Sacra in Sumerian Literature,” in *Approaches to Sumerian Literature: Studies in Honor of Stip (H.L.J. Vanstiphout)*, ed. Piotr Michalowski and Niek Veldhuis (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 13–36; William Desmond, *Is There a Sabbath for Thought? Between Religion and Philosophy* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 186–88; Sylvia Huot, *Allegorical Play in the Old French Motet: The Sacred and the Profane in Thirteenth-Century Polyphony* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 13; Suzan Ilcan, “The Marginal Other: Modern Figures and Ethical Dialogues,” *Postmodernism and the Ethical Subject*, ed. Barbara Gabriel and Suzan Ilcan (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2004), 227–53; here 245 and 250; Stephen D. Moore, *God’s Beauty Parlor: And Other Queer Spaces in and Around the Bible* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 232, n. 127; Cynthia L. Peters, *Deaf American Literature: From Carnival to the Canon* (Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press, 2000), 30, n. 22.

function in cultural criticism of the current moment. Four hundred years ago it also had a recognizable meaning, but a very different one.

Christologically-inspired commentary on the pagan classics had been common from the twelfth century onward in the work of Arnoul d'Orléans, John of Garland, and the anonymous author of the *Ovide moralisé*; sixteenth-century humanists devised an even bolder project: actually rewriting the pagan classics, Martial's and Horace's in particular, so as to align them with proper Christian ends. Thus came into being the original *parodia sacra*, a type of work that appears to have been in vogue around 1600 and that drew on the spirit of prior expurgation projects such as the revision undergone by Petrarch at the hands of the Franciscan Friar Girolamo Malipiero in his *Il Petrarca spirituale* of 1536.¹⁹

Typically the "parody" carried a two-word title (name of the pagan author plus a past participle connoting renewal) and a longer subtitle containing some inflected form of the term *parodia sacra*. The German humanist Thomas Sagittarius (1577–1621), for example, rector and professor of logic at Jena, published his version of a reoriented Horace in his *Horatius Christianus, sive Parodiae sacrae ad Horatii ductum noviter accommodatae*, and the Reverend Johannes Burmeister of Lüneburg (south of Hamburg), presented to the world of letters his ameliorated Lutheran version of Martial in 1612, rechristened *Martialis renatus: parodiarum sacrarum partes tres quibus obposita M. Val. Martialis Epigrammata*.²⁰ In England their near-contemporary George Herbert rewrote a poem addressing an earthly lover so as to create a new work devoted to God and entitled it "A Parodie." In Herbert's case scholarly debate has not completely disentangled the strands of musical history that may be bound up with a separate literary tradition, nor has it resolved the question of whether such reworkings imply a judgment against the secularity of the source material; it is however clear that in the parallel English vernacular tradition of the day the term continued to carry the contrasting sense of ridicule it has often had throughout its pluri-millennial lifespan.²¹ "Sacra," for

¹⁹ On this work, see Ugo Rozzo, "Italian Literature on the Index," *Church, Censorship, and Culture in Early Modern Italy*, ed. Gigliola Fragnito, trans. Adrian Belton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 194–222; here 210–11.

²⁰ Thomas E. Maresca, *Pope's Horatian Poems* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1966), 28; J. P. Sullivan, *Martial: The Unexpected Classic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 281–82; and William Fitzgerald, *Martial: The World of the Epigram* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 190–06. Sullivan makes the important point that Burmeister turns Martial's obscenities to anti-Catholic ends but probably goes too far in comparing Burmeister's project to the work of his predecessor cleric François Rabelais; cf. Fitzgerald's insightful comments.

²¹ The use of "parodie" is attested in a Ben Jonson play of 1616 as meaning to make a work "absurder then [*sic*] it was." Anthony Martin, "George Herbert and Sacred 'Parodie,'" *Studies in Philology* 93.4 (Fall 1996): 443–70; here 449. Martin's article is the best place to begin for an overview of the seventeenth-century sacred parody question, which comprises a number of details too fine to address here. On the musical tradition of sacred parody, note the composition as

its part, appears to have connoted an implicit opposition to “humana” in the contemporary scholarly tradition, as evidenced by the 1630 treatise entitled *De Eloquentia sacra et humana* by the French Jesuit Nicolas Caussin. All of the foregoing explains why as recently as the 1960s a scholar of seventeenth-century English poetry would speak of sacred parody as the conversion of “the poetry of profane love into the poetry of divine love.”²²

Could *parodia sacra* have been in use before the era of the seventeenth-century humanistic rewritings of Sagittarius and Burmeister? Bakhtin at times strongly implies that it did have medieval currency, referring in *Rabelais and His World* to “these centuries-old phenomena—the *parodia sacra*, the *risus paschalis*, and the immense medieval comic literature” and presenting it in a terminological bric-à-brac among genuinely medieval Latinate terms such as *joca monachorum* (monks’ riddles) and *festum follorum* (Feast of Fools) and what can only be called untranslatable Bakhtinian neologisms such as “lingua sacra pileata.”²³ The term *Risus paschalis* (Easter laughter) was certainly in use by the early sixteenth century and the phenomenon it designated appears to have been much older, but we can confidently rule out any pre-sixteenth-century usage of *parodia sacra* for the simple reason that “parody” was not part of the medieval rhetorical vocabulary.²⁴ The *Patrologia Latina* database contains but three citations for *parodia*, none later than Prudentius (died ca. 415 C.E.). None of the common medieval rhetorical manuals (Geoffrey de Vinsauf’s *Poetria nova*, Cicero’s *Rhetorica*, Guido Faba’s *Summa dictaminis*, the anonymous *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, for instance) mentions any form of *parodia*, a term, as is widely known, of Greek origin. The *Rhetorica ad Herennium* treats epanaphora, paronomasia, and asyndeton, but not parody.²⁵ Should orators wish to engage humoristically with the words and ideas of others, this work suggests they do so through “imitatione depravata” (loosely translated in the Loeb

recently as a generation ago by Roger Smalley of a work entitled *Missa parodia 1* (London: Faber Music, 1972).

²² Louis Martz, *The Poetry of Meditation: A Study in English Religious Literature*, 2nd ed. (1954; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962), 184.

²³ “From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse” 77. The phrase’s power derives from imagining the Sacred Word coiffed with the headgear of festival (*pileus*). The other terms cited appear in *Rabelais and His World*. The Iswolsky translation of таких многовековых явлений as “these century old phenomena” (134) is defective and should read “centuries-old phenomena,” as I indicate in my modification. I thank Ernest A. Zitser, PhD, for essential assistance with the Russian on this point.

²⁴ To my knowledge, this observation concerning the term *parodia sacra* has been made previously only by Joseph A. Dane in *Parody: Critical Concepts Versus Literary Practices*, *Aristophanes to Sterne* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), 176. On *risus paschalis*, see Jarmila F. Veltruský, *A Sacred Farce from Medieval Bohemia: Mastičkář* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1985), 309 and the references there.

²⁵ At 4.13.19, 4.23.32, and 4.30.41 respectively. The FEW dates the entry of “parody” into French to the end of the sixteenth century. See Walter von Wartburg, *Französisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch* (Basel: R. G. Zbinden, 1955), 7:661.

edition as “caricature”) or “inversione” (word-level irony).²⁶ Geoffrey de Vinsauf, for his part, flatly proclaims the comic to be a realm where the rhetorician has nothing worthwhile to contribute.²⁷

Quintilian’s *Institutio oratoria* does mention παρωδία in the broad sense of an orator’s imitative technique, but the work was not rediscovered in complete form until the later medieval period and diverges markedly at any rate from the tradition that gave rise to the modern notion of parody as humorous imitation of form in verse.²⁸ In any case, when Church officials wanted to condemn the excesses of the Feast of Fools, an urge which overcame them with some frequency throughout the centuries, they had recourse to the vocabulary of moral reprobation, not of generic classification.²⁹ They referred to “debacchationes obscenas” (“indecent frenzy”) or “ritus ille impiissimus et insanus qui regnat per totam Franciam” (“that most impious and outrageous rite widespread throughout all of France”) or, in the vernacular, “grans detestables abus . . . abhominables desordonnances et insolences” (“great detestable misdeeds . . . abominable acts of wild conduct and brazen impiety”).³⁰ That is to say, they lunged for the nearest epithet; to cast about for a suitable generic term from the rhetorical tradition would have been beside the point.

True, a rubric in a fifteenth-century manuscript housed in the Vatican attributes a “missa ironice” to the Wycliffe heretics (“Viclefo haeretico”),³¹ but “missa ironice” refers to one specific case of comic inversion, whereas *parodia sacra* is an umbrella term purporting to cover textual phenomena as disparate and far-flung

²⁶ Ad C. Herennium, ed. and trans. Harry Caplan. Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964), 18–19.

²⁷ “A comic subject rejects diction that has been artfully laboured over; it demands plain words only.” *Poetria Nova of Geoffrey of Vinsauf*, trans. Margaret F. Nims (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1967), 84.

²⁸ Quintilian’s work was rediscovered in 1416, to be exact; James J. Murphy, *Medieval Rhetoric: A Select Bibliography*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989), xii. On Quintilian’s notion of parody, see Fred W. Householder, Jr., “ΠΑΡΩΔΙΑ,” *Classical Philology* 39.1 (January 1944): 1–9; here 7.

²⁹ The most comprehensive overview of the history of ecclesiastical proclamations concerning the Feast of Fools remains E. K. Chambers’ *The Mediaeval Stage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1903), vol. I. For reevaluations of Chambers, see Max Harris, “A Rough and Holy Liturgy: A Reassessment of the Feast of Fools,” in “*risus sacer – sacrum risibile*”: *Interaktionsfelder von Sakralität und Gelächter im kulturellen und historischen Wandel*, ed. Katja Gvozdeva and Werner Röcke (Bern: Peter Lang, 2009), 77–100, and Margot Fassler, “The Feast of Fools and *Danielis Ludus*: Popular Tradition in a Medieval Cathedral Play,” *Plainsong in the Age of Polyphony*, ed. Thomas Forrest Kelly (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 65–99.

³⁰ Chambers, *Mediaeval Stage*, 2:279, quoting Pope Innocent III in 1207; Chambers, *Mediaeval Stage*, 1:292, quoting Gerson around 1400; Jean Gerson, *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Palémon Glorieux (Paris: Desclée, 1966), 7:409.

³¹ Novati, “La parodia sacra,” 195, n. 3.

as lines of Latin liturgy reincorporated in non-vernacular profane poetry for a learned audience at the twelfth-century court of the archbishop of Cologne and a macaronically parodic sermon offering mock-serious sexual instruction probably destined to enliven newlyweds' banquets in sixteenth-century Normandy.³² One could continue the list: into the circle of *parodia sacra* are placed a very late classical work like the *Coena Cypriani* and the performative midwinter antics particularly prevalent in French churches; the term ropes up various arrays of ludic reference made to Eucharistic symbolism (such as the conclusion to Chaucer's *Summoner's Tale*) alongside a medieval Bohemian jocosely incongruous juxtaposition of characters from the Christ passion story with a contemporary spice marketplace.³³

Issues of categorizing aside, how did *parodia sacra* shift between 1600 and 1900 from denoting the upward production of sacred out of profane material to its reverse, the profaning of the sacred? This is the nub of the problem and lies at the crux of the argument of this article. Two slightly different questions need to be distinguished from one another, namely the moment at which *parodia sacra* displaced the previous terms through which commentators from the seventeenth century onward described holiday-time carnivalesque ceremonies such as the Feast of Fools, and secondly the reasons for and consequences of this shift.

The first of two crucial turning points on the former question appears to have come in an important article entitled "La Parodia sacra nelle letterature moderne" published in 1889 by a thirty-year-old Italian literary critic of the historicist school named Francesco Novati. The piece was a wide-ranging eighty-eight-page disquisition on the phenomenon of the burlesquing of sacred themes in a variety of forms over two thousand years of Western history.³⁴ In the decades and centuries prior to Novati, describing the profanation of the sacred had ranged from the frankly condemnatory language of an early study on the *Fête des fous* ("ces folies payennes," "les autres abus qui ont régné de tems en tems"), to the slightly less dogmatic terms adopted by the famous Du Cange historical dictionary of 1678 (the entry "Kalendæ" on liturgical burlesque contains the qualifications "ludicra impia," "ludicra hujus festivitates," "ritu indecenti," and, attributed to St. Peter Chrysologus, "crimina"), to the more analytical terms used by Thomas Wright ("grotesque," "burlesque," "caricature," and "this mediaeval love of

³² Respectively, the Archpoet's Confession in the *Carmina Burana* collection and the anonymous *Sermon joyeux pour rire* in *Recueil de sermons joyeux*, ed. Jelle Koopmans (Geneva: Droz, 1988), 543–52.

³³ Veltruský, *A Sacred Farce*.

³⁴ Francesco Novati, "La parodia sacra nelle letterature moderne," *Studi critici e letterari* (Turin: Loescher, 1889), 177–265.

parody") in his important 1875 study.³⁵ It appears that no one prior to Novati, with the possible exception of Wright ("We trace a great love for parody in the middle ages, which spared not even things the most sacred" [171]), had come close to joining the words "parody" and "sacred" in a lasting bond.³⁶ Even when "parody" was evoked, any broad, all-encompassing notion of the religious or the sacred as target was invariably missing, as indicated by Louis de Petit Julleville's 1885 focused and limited characterization of the *sermon joyeux* as a "parody of the religious sermon" ("parodie du sermon religieux") and of the *Fête des Fous* as a case of "parody of the ecclesiastical hierarchy" ("parodie de la hiérarchie ecclésiastique").³⁷ This is an important point to which I shall return shortly.

Novati's thesis was that a certain playful attitude—sometimes harshly irreverent, sometimes not—toward things religious could be traced throughout the history of Western culture, beginning with the Roman Saturnalia and stretching through the Feast of Fools and *sermon joyeux* all the way to a satirical 1760s French tract on literary taste and an earnest socialist pamphlet of his own day that both borrowed the tried-and-true Ten Commandments form.³⁸ Although most of Novati's attention was turned to the burlesque and jocose tradition, his conception of parody—never explicitly spelled out—resembled a capacious definition of any song sung in imitation of another, leading him to consider the Renaissance expurgators and seventeenth-century authors of pious *parodia sacra* based on profane classical originals as parodists, too. This, combined with his Romantically-inflected argument that located the origin of all perennially appealing cultural forms in "the people" ("il popolo," 264), resulted in what might be termed a Gautier-and-Goliards model of parody: pious poets like Gautier de Coincy and raucously irreverent rhymesters like the Archpoet were essentially engaged in a broadly similar struggle over poetic forms that were popular in origin; only the

³⁵ Jean-Baptiste Lucotte du Tilliot (also Tillot), *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de la Fête des foux* (Lausanne: Bousquet, 1751), 43; Charles du Fresne, Seigneur du Cange, *Glossarium mediæ et infimæ latinitatis* (Paris: Librairie des Sciences et des Arts, 1938), 4:481–85; Thomas Wright, *A History of Caricature and Grotesque in Literature and Art* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1875), 172.

³⁶ The term appears not to have immediately displaced all possible rival synonyms, however, as one finds "parodies sacrilèges" and "parodie des choses saintes" in Charles-Victor Langlois, "La littérature goliardique," *Revue politique et littéraire: Revue bleue* 51 (1893), 174–80; here 174 and 175.

³⁷ Louis Petit de Julleville, *Les Comédiens en France au Moyen Age* (Paris: Léopold Cerf, 1885), 40. Other terms having been used to designate the phenomenon as a whole include "travestissement," "Gebetsparodie," and "Götterkomik," as in Hermann Kleinknecht, *Die Gebetsparodie in der Antike*. Tübinger Beiträge zur Altertumswissenschaft, 28 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1937) and Otto Höfler, "Götterkomik: Zur Selbstrelativierung des Mythos," *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur* 100.5 (1971): 371–89.

³⁸ The "Décatalogue du Dieu du goût" ("Ten Commandments of the God of Good Taste") of 1764 and Giuseppe Barbiana's "Dieci Comandamenti del Lavoratore" ("Ten Commandments of the Worker") of 1884. Novati, "La parodia sacra," 256 and 264.

direction—upwardly edificatory versus downwardly celebratory—separated the one from the other.³⁹

To Novati all of this textual production passes for *parodia sacra*, a term occasionally replaced by the exact synonyms “*parodia religiosa*” (198), “*parodia liturgica*” (195, n. 2), and “*parodia religioso-politica*” (255), and whose plural forms appear as “*parodie sacre*” (235, 247), and “*parodie erotico-sacre*” (210). Clearly each time Novati wrote “*parodia sacra*” he considered himself to be speaking the everyday Italian vernacular rather than the precisely classificatory Latin one might perceive when happening upon his essay title out of context (such as in the footnote in *Rabelais and His World* to which he probably owes whatever continued recognition he has, for instance). He had no qualms about declaring the importance of his material to the history of human thought, but nowhere does he have recourse to any ennobling Latin neologisms. Creation of the Bakhtinian *parodia sacra*, Latinate and anti-edificatory, would hence require a second turning point, the spark of a misreading. Three decades after Novati’s essay appeared such a spark was supplied by another critic probably best known to non-Germanic posterity as another denizen of Footnote 30, Chapter One of *Rabelais and His World*: Paul Lehmann.⁴⁰

In the first systematic study of the phenomenon of medieval parody in the Latin tradition, Lehmann, a Munich professor of philology, suggested that Novati’s analytical model had been constructed on the opposition of a *parodia sacra* against an implied *parodia mundana*. This misleading claim would have considerable repercussions, and the passage in question is worth quoting:

³⁹ For example, in his conclusion Novati writes “e per combattere la corruzione de’ costumi non trovò di meglio che costringere la poesia profana a cederle le sue armi medesime; e sull’aria delle più folli canzoni, sulle melodie più gradite ai volghi, acconciò parole divote, quando non parodiò addirittura le canzoni stesse. Così quel che si faceva già dai chierici in tempi remoti, tornano nel XIII secolo a fare in Francia Gautier de Coinci ed altri pii rimatori; nel XV in Italia i laudesi; che più? lo tentano ancora nel XVI il Malipiero a danno del Petrarca, nel XVII il Patrignani coll’ *Anacreonte Cristiano*, per tacer dei rugiadosi autori della *Philomèle Séraphique* e de’ *Rossignols spirituels*” (264) (“to combat the corruption of morals it [i.e., the Church] could not find a better solution than to force profane poetry to surrender its own weapons to the Church; and to the tune of the most raucous songs and to the people’s most beloved melodies it affixed pious words and sometimes even parodied the songs themselves. What the clerics did in remote times was repeated in France in the thirteenth century by Gautier de Coinci and other religious poets; and by the *laudesi* [i.e. pious poets] in Italy in the fifteenth century. What else? In the sixteenth century Malipiero parodies Petrarch poorly and in the seventeenth Patrignani with his *Christian Anacreon* has a go at it, to say nothing of the maudlin authors of the *Philomèle Séraphique* and the *Rossignols spirituels*”). I thank Profs. Louis W. Kibler and Elena Past for invaluable assistance in translating Novati.

⁴⁰ Footnote as numbered in the Iswolsky translation, that is, for the sake of convenience.

Die Einteilung und Behandlung meines Stoffes nach den Formen (Evangelium, Messe, Hymnus usw.) habe ich verworfen, da sie leicht zu langweiligen Wiederholungen geführt hätte und die Parodien mit den gleichen oder verwandten Formen im Inhalt z. T. grundverschieden sind. So ging es auch nicht an, nach Novati's Vorbilde die *Parodia sacra* und etwa die *Parodia mundana* für sich zu erörtern.⁴¹

[I have rejected categorizing my material according to generic criteria (Gospel, Mass, Hymn, and so on), for this would easily have led to tedious repetition, and parodies with the same or related forms can nonetheless differ partly in essential content. Consequently, it was also out of the question to treat *Parodia sacra* and, say, *Parodia mundana* separately and individually following Novati's model.]

Lehmann goes on to elaborate on his dissatisfaction with Novati's approach by declaring that only outwardly do the types of works he, Lehmann, is writing on (the Gamblers' Mass, the Lucifer's Letter form, and so on) evince spirituality; inwardly they demonstrate a jumbled mixture of the holy with the worldly. Such a puzzling declaration suggests that he had not read Novati's work particularly closely, because nowhere in the predecessor's article is it suggested that religious parody is to a great extent spiritual ("vielfach geistlich"), as Lehmann puts it.⁴² Novati in fact largely argues the reverse, that much parody of the sacred is a worldly and downwardly-oriented affair, writing at one point of the "slippery slope" ("*sdrucchiolevole pendio*" [181]) of joking irreverence. A cursory examination of his conclusion (partially cited in note 39 above) could, however, mistakenly lead a reader to believe that Novati was espousing a redemptive, low-to-high model of *parodia sacra*, as Lehmann implies.

Bakhtin cites Novati's and Lehmann's studies, as well as a 1914 French work on parodies of "pious themes" in medieval French poetry, as the main precursors to his own approach.⁴³ As should be clear by now, however, none of these

⁴¹ Paul Lehmann, *Die Parodie im Mittelalter* (Munich: Drei Masken, 1922), 43 (my translation). The second edition of 1963 contains unaltered restatements of the points I quote (24).

⁴² "Nur äusserlich ist die Parodie vielfach geistlich, innerlich geht Kirchliches und Weltliches häufig durcheinander" (42).

⁴³ The text of Footnote 30 of Chapter 1 of *Rabelais and His World* reads as follows: "Other than separate sections in works devoted to the general history of medieval literature (for example, [Adolf] Ebert, [Ernst Robert] Curtius), there are three special works describing sacred parody: (1) F. Novati, *La parodia sacra nelle letterature moderne*, (see Novati's *Studi critici e letterari*, Turin, 1889). (2) Eero Ilvonen, *Parodies de thèmes pieux dans la poésie française du moyen âge*, Helsingfors, 1914. (3) Paul Lehmann, *Die Parodie im Mittelalter*, Munich, 1922. The three works complement each other. Novati embraces the widest field of sacred parody (his work is not outdated and remains basic). Ilvonen offers a series of critical texts of French parody only (the combination of French and Latin languages, a frequent feature of parodical literature). The texts are preceded by a general introduction concerning medieval parody and contain the author's own commentaries. Lehmann provides an excellent introduction to the literature of sacred parody but limits himself exclusively to the Latin examples. All three authors conceive medieval parody as something isolated and specific; they do not, therefore, disclose the organic link of this parody with the larger world of

predecessors—indeed, almost certainly no one anywhere prior to Bakhtin—had used *parodia sacra* as a Latin term describing any earthly-oriented, anti-spiritual textual phenomenon of any kind.⁴⁴ Lehmann had come closest, but only as he simultaneously cast aside the term as having little conceptual interest. The inescapable conclusion seems to be that Bakhtin perceived something valuable in Lehmann's mistaken reading of Novati and decided that a few prosaic stumbling blocks should not keep him from formulating a highly attractive improvement on what had gone before. "Parodia sacra" is a construct, one that carries the heft of systematic scientific inquiry and recalls the neo-Latinate coinages such as *nomina sacra* spawned by the convergence of Germanic philology and religious studies in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In fact, it was none other than Paul Lehmann's teacher, the classical philologist Ludwig Traube, who coined *nomina sacra* in 1907 on the model of a ninth-century usage of *nomina dei* to designate abbreviated forms of sacred terms found in early Christian scriptural codices, and it seems likely that as he tossed out the term Lehmann, whether consciously or not, was modeling *parodia sacra* on this philological coinage.⁴⁵

Bakhtin's repeated use of *parodia sacra* thus conjures up a cultic, ritualistic phenomenon innate to any healthy practice of religious rite, the game that social scientists have glimpsed *homo religiosus* playing with the mysteries of the divine

the culture of folk humor."

⁴⁴ Lest the reader wonder whether the term *parodia sacra* could have had currency in a distinctly Russian rhetorical tradition, it should be noted that there appears to be no use of it anywhere there. In Feofan Prokopovič, *De arte rhetorica libri X*, ed. Renate Lachmann. Slavistische Forschungen, 27, 2 (Cologne: Böhlau, 1982), originally published in 1706, for example, humor is treated as a rhetorical tool in book 5, chapter 7 (308–18), without recourse to the notion of parody. I thank Ernest A. Zitser for generous bibliographical assistance on this point. The folklorist Vladimir Propp, interestingly, notes that carnivalesque themes were completely absent from clerically-dominated Russian medieval literature, thereby providing further support for the proposition that on this point Bakhtin's gaze roamed westward toward that which was nowhere to be found in his homeland's traditions. Vladimir Propp, *On the Comic and Laughter*, ed. and trans. Jean-Patrick Debbèche and Paul Perron (1976; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 133. See also Caryl Emerson, *The First Hundred Years of Mikhail Bakhtin* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 166–67.

⁴⁵ "Ich habe schon früher gebraucht und wende auch hier wieder an als Bezeichnung der Gruppe von alten Wörtern, bei denen im Griechischen und in der früheren lateinischen Zeit die Kürzung durch Kontraktion vollzogen wurde, den Ausdruck: Nomina sacra . . . Denn was wir *nomina sacra* nennen, nannte Christian von Stavelot ganz ähnlich *nomina dei*." ("I have earlier used the expression *nomina sacra* and will again use it here as a term for the group of older words by which abbreviation was achieved via contraction in the Greek and the early Latin period . . . So what we call *nomina sacra* Christian of Stavelot similarly called *nomina dei*"). Ludwig Traube, *Nomina sacra: Versuch einer Geschichte der christlichen Kürzung. Quellen und Untersuchungen zur lateinischen Philologie des Mittelalters*, 2 (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1907), 17.

in the purer, earlier ages.⁴⁶ Intentionally or accidentally, *parodia sacra* also dresses up highly disparate and varied phenomena in a single laboratory coat of scientific sanction and discursive respectability, resonating as it does with the neo-scholastic Latin spoken by foundational scholars of religion such as Rudolf Otto, who famously plumbed the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* of religion in his 1917 book entitled *Das Heilige*, or with Emile Durkheim's analysis in *Les Formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse* of 1912, a work hugely influential in pioneering the sacred as a category of cultural analysis.⁴⁷ Curiously, however, Bakhtin's ever-shifting use of italics, quotation marks, and an occasional "so-called" has the effect of setting off *parodia sacra* as someone else's words, primarily Novati's and Lehmann's, though he simultaneously embraced the term closely enough to have made it indissociable from his name in current-day criticism.⁴⁸ It seems odd that the progenitor of countless studies of dialogism and linguistic hybridity would adopt such an

⁴⁶ Bakhtin, as noted later in this article, does in fact distinguish between rustic, ritualistic ancient degradation and a more deliberate and consequential medieval version of the same. For example, the "*Cyprian Feast* is an ancient and excellent example of medieval 'parodia sacra,' that is, sacred parody—or to be more accurate, parody on sacred texts and rituals. Its roots go deep into ancient ritualistic parody, ritual degrading, and the ridiculing of higher powers. But these roots are distant; the ancient ritualistic element in them has been re-interpreted; parody now [i.e., in the medieval period] fulfills the new and highly important functions of which we spoke above" (Bakhtin, "Prehistory," 71–72). The scientific connotations of the term *parodia sacra* as it has come to be used often tend to blur this distinction, however.

⁴⁷ "Toutes les croyances religieuses connues, qu'elles soient simples ou complexes, présentent un même caractère commun : elles supposent une classification des choses, réelles ou idéales, que se représentent les hommes, en deux classes, en deux genres opposés, désignés généralement par deux termes distincts que traduisent assez bien les mots de *profane* et de *sacré*. La division du monde en deux domaines comprenant, l'un tout ce qui est sacré, l'autre tout ce qui est profane, tel est le trait distinctif de la pensée religieuse . . ." ("All known forms of religious belief, whether simple or complex, manifest a common trait: they presuppose a classification of the objects, real or ideal, of human thought into two categories, two opposing types, which are evoked by two separate terms that correspond fairly closely to the words 'profane' and 'sacred.' This division of the world into two spheres, one for the sacred, and the other for the profane, is the distinguishing characteristic of religious thought.") Emile Durkheim, *Les Formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1912), 50–51 (my translation). For a very useful overview of the construction of the scientific sacred, see Henri Bouillard, "La Catégorie du sacré dans la science des religions," *Le Sacré: Études et recherches*, ed. Enrico Castelli (Paris: Aubier, 1974), 33–56; and François-André Isambert, *Le Sens du sacré: Fête et religion populaire* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1982), 215–74.

⁴⁸ Of the twelve total uses of the term in the three works cited in note 14 above, the Latin phrase *parodia sacra* occurs as a stand-alone, unglossed expression nine times (eight of these within quotation marks), as an italicized parenthetical translation of the vernacular phrase "sacred parody" once, and twice as a Latin term followed by a vernacular translation. Hence "But let us return to the Latin 'parodia sacra'" (*Prehistory*, 76); "[t]he purpose of such comments . . . was . . . to justify the 'sacred parody' (*parodia sacra*), that is, the parody of sacred texts and rites" (*Rabelais and His World*, 77); "the so-called *parodia sacra*, 'sacred parody'" (*Rabelais and His World*, 14). In these instances the translators have scrupulously respected the specificity of the punctuation and typographical forms found in the Russian originals.

unstable relationship to the learned word of the Other here, as though *parodia sacra*, quote-unquote, were both his and not his, but aside from the obvious explanation that Bakhtin wished to distance himself from what he viewed as the superficial treatments given by his predecessors (even as he attributed to them a category of analysis that they had not used), a second, more subtle phenomenon may be at work. The ambivalent feel of Bakhtin's use of *parodia sacra* in all twelve instances of it cited in the last footnote smacks of a form of the dialectic of identification versus alienation I evoked at the outset of this essay. In this he follows in the footsteps of many precursors.

For as long as moderns have been noticing the curious phenomenon of laughter in the realm of religious ritual and belief as preserved in the written records of a great number of pre-modern traditions they have frequently been of two equal and opposite minds about it, almost as though the glass wall of separation from the phenomenon served as a prism refracting the light transmitted through it into two equal but opposing beams, into a pair of equal and opposite reactions. Prior to the invention of the Bakhtinian *parodia sacra*, studies of what would now be called the carnivalesque tradition often stressed the oddity and alterior nature of the phenomena described—with “bizarre” being a favored adjective—even as they usually sided squarely in favor of the sentiments conveyed.

To Novati, the *Coena Cypriani* was a “bizarre jest” (“bizzarra facezia”); likewise, one later nineteenth century account of the *Fête des fous* festivities found “bizarre upendings of convention” (“bizarres travestissements”) in them, and the encyclopedic *Histoire littéraire de la France* refers dryly to the “odd songs in the vernacular” (“singuliers chants en langue vulgaire”) heard in almost every medieval French city at Christmastime.⁴⁹ At the same time, a strongly liberationist streak ran through much contemporary parody discourse, even of the eighteenth century already, doubtless an extension of the *castigare ridendo mores* tradition of Molière's day: an 1870 study of parody introduced it as one of an array of sharp objects satire reaches for when it wishes to poke tyranny in the eye, and a 1738 pamphlet by a playwright defending his craft spoke of the “reasoned and even useful” moral function served by parody in attacking false virtue rather than its authentic forms.⁵⁰

A striking example of the congruence of these stances can be found in the work of the aforementioned Thomas Wright, who produced probably the most

⁴⁹ Novati, “La parodia sacra,” 178; Charles Lenient, *La Satire en France au Moyen Age*, 4th ed. (1859; Paris: Hachette, 1893), 423; *Histoire littéraire de la France*; ouvrage commencé par des religieux bénédictins de la Congrégation de Saint Maur, et continué par des membres de l'Institut (Paris: Victor Palmé, 1892), 16:264–65.

⁵⁰ Octave Delepierre, *La Parodie chez les Grecs, chez les Romains, et chez les modernes* (London: Trübner, 1870), 5; Louis Fuzelier, *Discours à l'occasion d'un discours de M. D. L. M. [de La Motte] sur les parodies*, (n.p., 1738), xxv.

comprehensive nineteenth-century study of these phenomena. Referring to the unsuccessful 1817 prosecution of a British political satirist for blasphemy, Wright asserted that “the examples brought forward in the celebrated trial of William Hone were mild in comparison to some which are found scattered here and there in mediaeval manuscripts.” Mouth agape, he goes on to note of the goliardic *Missae de Potatoribus* (*Drunkards’ Mass*), that “[i]n this extraordinary composition, even the pater-noster is parodied,” thereby implicitly attributing a strong, undiluted character to this culture of comic primitivism, a point furthered in a later chapter through a curt expression of doubt about the existence of a fully developed sense of humor in the medieval period.⁵¹ The peroration to the goliards section of his five-hundred-page tome is worth quoting at length, as it affords a number of important insights:

The spirit of the goliards continued to exist long after the name had been forgotten; and the mass of bitter satire which they had left behind them against the whole papal system, and against the corruptions of the papal church of the middle ages, were a perfect godsend to the reformers of the sixteenth century, who could point to them triumphantly as irresistible evidence in their favour. Such scholars as [the Lutheran theologian] Flacius Illyricus eagerly examined the manuscripts which contained this goliardic poetry, and printed it, chiefly as good and effective weapons in the great religious strife which was then convulsing European society. To us, besides their interest as literary compositions, they have also a historical value, for they introduce us to a more intimate acquaintance with the character of the great mental struggle for emancipation from mediaeval darkness which extended especially through the thirteenth century, and which was only overcome for a while to begin more strongly and more successfully at a later period. They display to us the gross ignorance, as well as the corruption of manners, of the great mass of the mediaeval clergy. Nothing can be more amusing than the satire which some of these pieces throw on the character of monkish Latin.⁵²

The pushers of the parody envelope, it turns out, were proto-moderns with whom we can identify after all; the shocking strength and brazenness of their attacks was calibrated in proportion to the challenge they faced in unreformed Catholicism and the benighted, sclerotic nature of medieval society. What’s more, their battle was our (that is, Protestant and English) battle; their fight was right. Of course

⁵¹ Both quotations from Wright, *A History of Caricature and Grotesque in Literature and Art* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1875), 171. On the medieval sense of humor he writes, “It is somewhat doubtful whether what we call a jest, was really appreciated in the middle ages. Puns seem to have been considered as elegant figures of speech in literary composition, and we rarely meet with anything like a quick and clever repartee. In the earlier ages, when a party of warriors would be merry, their mirth appears to have consisted usually in ridiculous boasts, or in rude remarks, or in sneers at enemies or opponents” (200).

⁵² Wright, *A History*, 174.

Wright's confident teleology of progress was extirpated from the discourse of the medieval profession many decades ago along with his tone of partisan religious polemic, and although many recent commentators agree that medieval parody of religious themes was often at least partially reformist in intent, none express themselves nearly as categorically as he does.⁵³ Nonetheless, insofar as he wavers between awestruck surprise and eager identification he encapsulates the ambivalence that the combination of laughter and religion seems still to generate.

In the decades intervening between Wright and Bakhtin lies the revolutionary invention and codification of the scientific study of religion. Bakhtin's *parodia sacra*, as I have been arguing, is built on the implicit foundations of the work of scholars like Traube, Otto, and especially Durkheim, whose notion of the sacred provided Novati's *sacra* with far greater potency than it had had as a mere vernacular expression. Second and more striking, however, is the fact that even across the divide of the invention of scientific sociology the basic ambivalence inherent to the question is still discernable, albeit in altered form. It is my contention that the most distinctive, indeed the most seductive characteristic of Bakhtin's notion of *parodia sacra*, namely its emphasis on unresolved duality—whether via his linguistically-based model of dialogism or in his sociological model of ambivalent carnival laughter—reenacts a deeper fundamental reality about the nature of laughter in the face of the holy but with a brilliant twist: the ambivalence of the laughter observer is projected onto and incorporated into the concept itself.

When Bakhtin asserts that the laughter criticism of his day can be sorted into two opposing camps on the question of consequence (Rabelais as negative satirist versus Rabelaisian humor as purveyor of droll, insignificant pleasantries), and that he is the first critic to stress the both/and logic of folk humor's ambivalence, he may be correct on the broad question but is assuredly less so on the subcategory of folk humor that is *parodia sacra*.⁵⁴ To foreground and stress the theme of ambivalence may have been novel in the 1930s, but in more subtle ways the essential reflex subtending Bakhtin's stance has probably always been with us.

What is remarkable to observe in Bakhtin's elaboration of his notion of *parodia sacra* is the interplay between overt formulations of the idea of ambivalence on the one hand and, on the other, Bakhtin's apparently unconscious retention of a stance broadly similar to Wright's. That is to say, not only is the phenomenon said to be dualistic in its effects, but its expositor himself turns out to be of two minds about the accessibility and scrutability of these effects. Thus, for example, carnival

⁵³ See in particular Martha Bayless, *Parody in the Middle Ages: The Latin Tradition* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996).

⁵⁴ "The present-day analysis of laughter explains it either as purely negative satire . . . or else as gay, fanciful, recreational drollery deprived of philosophical content. The important point made previously, that folk humor is ambivalent, is usually ignored." Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 12.

laughter, as the credentialed humanist academic cannot be unaware, “is ambivalent: it is gay, triumphant, and at the same time mocking, deriding. It asserts and denies, it buries and revives.”⁵⁵ Or again,

in the Latin literature of the Middle Ages, the complex and contradictory process of accepting and then resisting the other’s word, the process of reverently heeding it while at the same time ridiculing it, was accomplished on a grand scale throughout all the Western European world.⁵⁶

This dialogic technique, Bakhtin asserts, has lived on in the modern novels of authors like Dostoevsky (thereby becoming part of our modern world), but paradoxically, we are told, *parodia sacra* retains its medieval alterity to the modern observer, inherently odd and shrouded as it is in an otherness that escapes full comprehension. Whence Bakhtin’s deployment of the inscrutability trope: “the so-called *parodia sacra*, ‘sacred parody,’ [is] one of the most peculiar and least understood manifestations of medieval literature,” even as the narrative style of all three major critical studies in which the term appears fosters strong readerly identification with and sympathy for this “cheerful folk word” in its struggle against the gloomy Latin of repressive pedants.⁵⁷ What could there be not to like about a cheerful folk word, perhaps not so peculiar after all?

Moreover, Bakhtin’s *parodia sacra* is a thing of bygone eras also because the fully festive laughter culture in which it once resided has disappeared and the steeply pitched medieval linguistic topography into which it set its grappling hooks has been leveled: “one must not transfer contemporary concepts of parodic discourse onto medieval parody (as one also must not do with ancient parody). In modern times the functions of parody are narrow and unproductive. Parody has grown sickly, its place in modern literature is insignificant.”⁵⁸ Likewise, one famous seventeenth-century denunciation of Rabelais’s scatology misses the mark, we are told, because by that time “[t]he link with the essential aspects of being, with the organic system of popular-festive images, has been broken.”⁵⁹ Bakhtin was far

⁵⁵ Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 11–12.

⁵⁶ Bakhtin, “Prehistory,” 77–78.

⁵⁷ Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 14, and “Prehistory,” 76. Recent important work by Slavacists on Bakhtin’s religion has provided crucial insights into the broad philosophical underpinnings that argue against a literalistic interpretation of these terms, but since they are usually taken at face value in non-Slavic criticism, I follow suit. See in particular Ruth Coates, *Christianity in Bakhtin: God and the Exiled Author* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), esp. 126–51. See also Alexander Mihailovic, *Corporeal Words: Mikhail Bakhtin’s Theology of Discourse* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1997), and Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist, *Mikhail Bakhtin* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), 120–45.

⁵⁸ Bakhtin, “Prehistory,” 71. This quotation is situated in a discussion of an ur-text of the *parodia sacra* canon, the *Coena Cypriani* (also *Cyprian Feast*, as in note 46 above).

⁵⁹ Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 109.

from the only twentieth-century critic to stress holistic organicism and attribute its disappearance to a post-lapsarian modernity when speaking of laughter in the presence of the sacred, but he remains the critic who meditated the most evocatively on the subject.⁶⁰ Irretrievably lost to moderns, yet foundational in its importance to modern cultural paradigms and instantly accessible to the modern sensibility, odd and distant and yet so perfectly in synch with latter-day concerns for complexity and anti-authoritarianism, *parodia sacra* resides in a push-pull limbo of decided ambivalence and bi-directional paradox.

Such was not always the case, we are told. The “double aspect of the world and of human life” brought about by laughter culture existed from the earliest stages of cultural development, Bakhtin asserts, but in its first ritualistic forms laughter was constrained by having been granted equally sacred official status as seriousness.⁶¹ When every hero had his comic double and every serious cult its laughing analogue, true cultural depth was hampered, in essence, by predictability and routine, and laughter remained superficial. The best thing that ever happened to laughter, Bakhtin implies, was to be first degraded by the onset of class structures and then banished from officialdom by Christianity. Only then could a true dialectics of oppositionality between high and low develop in all of its complexity.⁶² Only then could the folk culture of laughter take full root. Hence medieval *parodia sacra*, in the Bakhtinian model, flowers in the high summer of development of a laughter culture preceded by a superficial ritualistic laughter and succeeded by a desiccated and shriveled modern laughter (occasional resurrectionists like Dostoevsky excepted).

The medievalist cannot accept such claims at face value.⁶³ In one of the most exacting and thorough investigations of the laughter phenomenon to date, the

⁶⁰ The idea is implicit in O. M. Freidenberg, “The Origin of Parody,” *Semiotics and Structuralism: Readings from the Soviet Union*, ed. Henryk Baran, trans. Henryk Baran, William Mandel, and A. J. Hollander (White Plains, NY: International Arts and Sciences Press, 1974), 269–83, as well as Vladimir Propp’s 1939 article “Ritual Laughter in Folklore (Apropos of the Tale of the Princess Who Would Not Laugh),” *Theory and History of Folklore*, trans. Ariadna Y. Martin, Richard P. Martin, et al., ed. Anatoly Liberman (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 124–46, and explicit in Aaron Gurevich, *Historical Anthropology of the Middle Ages*, ed. Jana Howlett (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1992), 164 and 176. Organicism more generally, it should be noted, was a notion of key importance in the modernist thought of Surrealists and their 1930s Russian successors such as the painter Wassily Kandinsky.

⁶¹ *Rabelais and His World*, 6.

⁶² *Rabelais and His World*, Introduction and Chapter 1, *passim*.

⁶³ Many Slavists, it should be noted, have never taken them at face value, pointing among other things to the dance Bakhtin engaged in with Marxist ideology and Russian totalitarianism. See Clark and Holquist, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, ch. 14, 295–320, and Sergei Averintsev, “Bakhtin, Laughter, and Christian Culture,” *Bakhtin and Religion: A Feeling for Faith*, ed. Susan M. Felch and Paul J. Contino (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2001), 79–95. See especially Emerson, *The First Hundred Years*, ch. 4, 162–206.

classical scholar Stephen Halliwell observes that “[r]itual laughter . . . is always *prima facie* incongruous” with the religious setting in which it occurs. “Ritual,” he writes in his study of the ancient Greek tradition,

standardly calls for the careful filtering of utterances and the silencing of potentially inappropriate speech; hence the term *euphēmia*, literally “auspicious speech,” often actually denotes “silence.” Ritual laughter, by sharp contrast, is fuelled by unrestrained, shocking and “unholy” speech, sometimes directly designated by *dusphēm*-terms . . . , i.e. as obtrusively “foul-mouthed” or “of ill omen,” and frequently evaluated as “shameful” (*aischros*).⁶⁴

It would be unwise, of course, to compare too closely ancient Greek polytheism with medieval Christian monotheism, especially since with the possible exception of the *risus paschalis* phenomenon laughter was only at best a tolerated rather than cultivated phenomenon in the latter.⁶⁵ Over and over Halliwell also warns against hazarding monolithic pronouncements about laughter in religious ritual, since local specificity to his mind is often much more informative than trans-phenomenal generalizations. Nevertheless, it seems noteworthy that even in an archaic period when laughter had official ceremonial sanction, participants in and observers of Greek ritual laughter found themselves of two minds about it, as though at no point in its existence did everyone involved ever consider the phenomenon routine, unremarkable, and wholly natural. Plutarch may have been nonchalant in noting that almost all forms of Greek religion showed evidence of the conflict between what Halliwell calls “euphemic theory and dusphemic practice,” between the serene ideal and the obscene real, but many other Greeks wrung their hands: the poet Callimachus appealed to Calliope for an explanation of how certain rituals could have come to incorporate shameful words and the Spartan Megillus, as given voice in Plato’s *Laws*, flatly asserted that lewd and drunken festival behavior was quite simply not permitted in his native region.⁶⁶

Whether in ancient Greece, medieval Europe, or the post-Enlightenment West, then, and whether viewed by participants or observers, contemporary with or removed from the events, the phenomenon of laughter in the face of the sacred shows signs of having elicited continual ambivalence for millennia before (and continuing into) Bakhtin’s theories.⁶⁷ One of the preeminent medieval examples of

⁶⁴ Halliwell, *Greek Laughter*, 201.

⁶⁵ The scholarship on the early history of *risus paschalis* is spotty; a frequently cited touchstone is a nineteenth century study that does not identify key sources it draws upon: Anton Linsenmayer, *Geschichte der Predigt in Deutschland von Karl dem Grossen bis zum Ausgange des vierzehnten Jahrhunderts* (Munich: Stahl, 1886), 180–82.

⁶⁶ Halliwell, *Greek Laughter*, 177, 201–02.

⁶⁷ The very religious experience itself, according to some philosophers of the holy, is also an oxymoronic affair of united contraries. Writing a generation before Bakhtin began research on his Rabelais book, Rudolf Otto described what he called the numinous experience—the essence of the

this is the 1445 letter signed by members of the faculty of theology at the University of Paris calling for a definitive ban of the Feast of Fools, the raucous festival of ritualized inversion celebrated by minor clergy at the Christmas season. To the learned clerical authors no condemnation of such idolatry could have been strong enough; from the perspective of the participants, on the other hand, their joking attitude had its place in legitimate and appropriate worship of the same deity as the one to which their superiors prayed. Preserved in a single remarkable late-medieval document, then, are the call and response (mainly call) of the two basic age-old antagonistic stances on the problem of laughter in the presence of the divine. On the one side, accusations of sacred space profaned, divine rite mocked and bespattered, nefarious crimes committed against the sanctity of religious ritual. On the other, professions of virtuous intent and self-justification leavened with a surprising declaration of humility.

The 1445 *contra festum fatuorum* letter gives voice to the joking subordinates, before rejecting their arguments, in these oft-quoted lines:

We do these things in jest and not in earnest, as the ancient custom is, so that once a year the foolishness innate in us can come out and evaporate. Don't wine skins and barrels burst very often if the air-hole is not opened from time to time? We, too, are old wine skins and broken barrels from which the wine of wisdom, overly fermented and retained with effort by us all year round in the service of God, would spill out uselessly if we could not engage in recreation from time to time through games and jests. Hence it's a good thing to permit joking from time to time so that we might be more receptive afterwards to wisdom.⁶⁸

religious reaction—in these terms: “These two qualities, the daunting and the fascinating, now combine in a strange harmony of contrasts, and the resultant dual character of the numinous consciousness . . . is at once the strangest and most noteworthy phenomenon in the whole history of religion.” Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry Into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational*, trans. John W. Harvey, 2nd Eng. ed. (1917; London: Oxford University Press, 1950), 31.

68

“nos ita joco, et non serio, facimus, sicut consuetum est ab antiquo, ut fatuitas nobis innata semel in anno effluat et evaporetur. Nonne utres et dolia vini saepius rumperentur, si spiraculum ipsorum interdum non laxaretur? Nos quidem utres veteres sumus et dolia semirupta, quare sapientiae vinum nimis fervens, quod per totum annum in Dei servitio nos comprimentes vi retineremus, efflueret inaniter, si non interdum ludis et fatuitatibus vacaremus. Jocis igitur aliquando vacandum est, ut fortiores postea ad retinendam sapientiam redeamus,” *Epistola XXI*, ed. Migne, P.L. 207, col. 1171C–D; and *Chartularium Universitatis Parisiensis*, ed. Henri Denifle and Émile Chatelain. 4 vols. (Paris: Delalain, 1897), 4:653. The passage is translated with varying degrees of literalness in Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 75; Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978), 202; Jeannine Horowitz and Sophia Menache, *L'Humour en chaire: Le Rire dans l'Église médiévale* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1994), 49; and Jeffrey L. Singman, *Robin Hood: The Shaping of the Legend* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998), 154. In a variant tradition it is attributed—wrongly, from what I can tell—to the proto-Rabelaisian preaching of a bold but unnamed higher cleric of Auxerre, as in Lenient, *La Satire*, 426, and Enid Welsford, *The Fool: His Social and Literary History* (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1935), 202. The

Less frequently cited is the subsequent paragraph containing the response of the festival condemners composing the letter. Not surprisingly, they reject out of hand the appeal to respectable ancient custom ("this rite grows out of a poisoned root. . . and takes its beginning from pagan and heathen debaucheries"), dismiss the barrel analogy as a lame excuse ("the metaphor they put forth about the wineskins and casks has no place here"), and seem generally intent on burnishing their credentials as the stern faces of clerical seriousness ("sins and silliness go against rational nature and offend it").⁶⁹ Yet they also feel the need to make the following concession:

We admit, however, that striving too long toward the actions of wisdom tires out the life forces that make up the body; and so it is good from time to time to engage in modest and honest games, so that these forces may be refreshed and fortified. Likewise, the most blessed St. John the Evangelist, playing with the partridge in his hand, responding to a boy who laughed at him for it, gave the example of the boy's own bow too long kept under too much tension, which, if it is not unstrung, loses its strength to send the arrow strongly.⁷⁰

The partridge anecdote, drawn from St. John Cassian's late-classical-era *Conferences* and Jacques de Voragine's medieval *Golden Legend*, Christianizes an ancient conception of relaxation (no less pagan in origin, incidentally, than the rites said to underlie the proscribed festivities) and has the effect of setting up an implicit conflict of recreative metaphors: against the image of Bacchic relaxation, encapsulated in the bursting barrel analogy, a second model of recreative release is promoted, that of the tensed bow in need of slackening.⁷¹ The one is denounced by the high clerics as disgustingly materialistic, whereas its virtuous replacement

above translation is culled from the Burke and Horowitz/Menache versions.

⁶⁹ "a radice venenata prodiit hic ritus . . . , et initium sumpsit a spurcitiis paganorum et infidelium," "Rursus similitudo quam proponunt de utribus et doliis, hic non habet locum," "Peccata namque et fatuitates sunt contra naturam rationabilem et eam offendunt." Translations from Latin, unless otherwise indicated, are my own. I thank Prof. Traugott Lawler for indispensable assistance on numerous points.

⁷⁰ "Fatemur autem quod ad actus sapientiae diutius tendendo, animales vires quae corpus concernunt, fatigant; quare bonum est interdum ludis modestis et honestis vacare, ut recreentur, et fortificentur, sicut beatissimus Evangelista Joannes ludens cum perdice in sua manu, cuidam propter hoc ipsum irridenti dedit exemplum de ipsius arcu diu et nimium protenso, qui si non relaxatur, vires perdit ad fortiter impellendum sagittam" (Migne, *P.L.* 207, col. 1172B).

⁷¹ The image of the tensed bow is found in Horace, among other ancient sources; see Horace's *Carmina* 2.10: "Apollo does not always stretch the bow." For the partridge anecdote, see, for example, Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, trans. William Granger Ryan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), I:54. For an analogous version involving Aesop and a group of boys playing marbles, see *Aesop's Fables*, ed. and trans. Laura Gibbs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 247. For a slightly different tradition involving St. Anthony and an archer, traceable to an early fourteenth-century exemplum, see Kolve, *The Play Called Corpus Christi*, 128–29.

is possibly meant to suggest the airy etherealness of lofty goals properly aimed at. Duspheemic practice, in Halliwell's terms as noted above, clashes with eupheemic theory; the raucousness of unbridled amusement is declared incompatible with the measured reserve characteristic of proper moral conduct. Laughter would appear to be banished from the hallowed halls of holy rite and ritual.

There is a late-medieval specificity to the argumentation, however: despite the evident virulence of opposing viewpoints, both parties in the dispute seem intent on staking a claim to some of the ground under their adversaries' feet. Thus, conservatives admit restrained and contemplative seriousness to be incomplete without counterbalancing moments of relaxation, just as revelers frame wild raucousness as a means of assuring proper worshipfulness the rest of the liturgical year — thereby espousing an early form of what would later come to be called "the safety valve theory" of preservation of order. It may also be that the revelers' claim of being "*dolia semirupta*" ("broken barrels") parallels the very orthodox "*vas perditum*" ("broken vessel") passage of Psalm 31:12 ("I have become like a broken vessel" / "*sum quasi vas perditum*" [Vulgate version]). Hence ambivalence doubles back on itself: on the question of laughter in the presence of the holy not only do decriers square off against defenders of the practice (a case of antagonistic ambivalence), but the seven named clerical signers of the letter show themselves to be as eager to draw the line of their godly world to include some relaxation as the merry-makers are to include the divine within the scope of their laughter world (a case of accommodationist ambivalence). Each stance, in other words, contains the germ of the other. Such nuance is glossed over in Bakhtin's model and its dichotomies of gloomy versus insouciant, intolerant versus liberated, and it is ill-advised to think of "the sacred" and "the comic" as homogeneous and oppositional entities.

To sum up: the problem of laughter in a religious context constitutes an important sub-branch of the laughter question more generally, yet one of the most widely known analytical paradigms purporting to describe the phenomenon in the West is flawed, founded as it is upon too many unexamined suppositions. Rather than continue to be used with great liberality, *parodia sacra*, like such other now-contested foundational terms of medieval studies as "courtly love" and "feudalism," should be used only sparingly and with caution.⁷² More specifically,

⁷² On the "feudalism" question, see Elizabeth A. R. Brown, "The Tyranny of a Construct: Feudalism and Historians of Medieval Europe," *American Historical Review* 79 (1974): 1063–88, and Susan Reynolds, *Fiefs and Vassals: the Medieval Evidence Reinterpreted* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994). Concerning the notion of "courtly love," see F. X. Newman, ed., *The Meaning of Courtly Love* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1969) and, in response, Jean Frappier, *Amour courtois*

Mikhail Bakhtin's writings on the topic, however brilliantly evocative and suggestive on the broad canvass of cultural criticism, should not be invoked as literal truths about the medieval period.⁷³

My reasons for claiming this can be summarized in the following points. First, *parodia sacra* is a term that is often assumed to be much older than its actual life span of less than a century. Second, its complicated provenance suggests that its real value is located more in the novel and scientific form it gives to age-old and repeatedly recurring conflicts and ambivalence inherent to the laughter problem than in any truly insightful conception it offers of the nature of medieval culture specifically. Third, its indissociability from the fundamental Bakhtinian notions of dialogism and carnival brings further complications, corralling and compressing as it does divergent types of medieval textual production into Bakhtin's problematic polar binaries of official and unofficial, thereby perpetuating oversimplifications of medieval cultural complexity. Are the Archpoet and the Archpriest playing exactly the same game merely because they seem to be united in their joyous willingness to dethrone stern clerical seriousness? Questions such as this are asked much less often than they should be. A fourth and related problem meriting at least brief mention is the unfortunate imbalance of attention accorded the two terms composing the phrase *parodia sacra* itself: whereas the nuances and subtleties of the workings of "parody" have been probed in dozens of studies over the past thirty years, the dubious and problematic proposition that one can speak of a monolithic manifestation of the medieval "sacred," especially as Bakhtin defines it, has received considerably less attention from scholars of medieval comic literature.⁷⁴

It is indisputable that the ubiquitous forms of the typically medieval comico-serious dialectic, from the *Carmina Burana* and *fabliaux* to late-medieval carnival

et table ronde (Geneva: Droz, 1973), 61–96.

⁷³ I thus add my voice to a growing list of commentators, many of them medievalists, who fault aspects of Bakhtin's comic model (though not heretofore *parodia sacra* in particular) for its reductiveness. See Bayless, *Parody*, 177–212; Richard M. Berrong, *Rabelais and Bakhtin: Popular Culture in Gargantua and Pantagruel* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986); Aron Gurevich, *Medieval Popular Culture: Problems of Belief and Perception*, trans. János M. Bak and Paul A. Hollingsworth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986); Dietz-Rüdiger Moser, "Lachkultur des Mittelalters? Michael Bachtin und die Folgen seiner Theorie," *Euphorion* 84.1 (1990): 89–111; Ryan D. Giles, *The Laughter of the Saints: Parodies of Holiness in Late Medieval and Renaissance Spain* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 5–6, 12; and the works cited in Halliwell, *Greek Laughter*, 204, n. 140.

⁷⁴ By contrast, scholars of the vernacular devotional tradition, especially in English, have been probing heterogeneity and multiplicity in medieval Christianity for decades; see *Culture and History, 1350–1600: Essays on English Communities, Identities and Writing*, ed. David Aers (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1992); and *Medieval Christianity in Practice* ed. Miri Rubin. Princeton Readings in Religions (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

drama, are a distinctive feature of medieval society.⁷⁵ Seemingly every form of serious medieval cultural production admitted the possibility of its own ludic reworking: chaste and noble tales of chivalric love circulated alongside raucous and anatomically-explicit *fabliaux* (in the case of Chaucer's *Knight's* and *Miller's Tales*, even within the same work); mock masses and widely-observed seasonal festivals created carnivalesque social inversions; and the most orthodox of devotional materials—whether written on parchment, carved in stone, fashioned out of stained glass, or sung—often spawned marginal images and sounds of riotous levity. Nothing in the foregoing argument should be construed as calling into question the facticity of this cultural production, although criticism does tend to overemphasize the prevalence of medieval overturning and undervalue the degree to which similar tropes have lived on in our own post-medieval thought and culture.⁷⁶

Rather, I hope to have identified a pressing need to rethink certain received opinions about the interaction of laughter with religious devotion in the medieval context. Growing attention has recently been paid to delineating some of the myriad ways in which laughter and religion, far from being homogenous entities squaring off against one another in a meteorological clash of opposing front systems, are nuanced phenomena given to unsuspected complexities and interpenetrations.⁷⁷ I am grateful for the opportunity accorded me here to explain what I find problematic about the established notion of *parodia sacra*; detailing what I propose to replace it with would far exceed the space remaining to me and is hence of necessity relegated to future publications. A first step will be to demonstrate how the term “the sacred” tends to lock up large expanses of medieval cultural terrain and social practice in the obstructive ice of a false homogeneity and unassailable unity that promotes caricature and overgeneralization. *Parodia sacra* is a fascinating concept—but more for what it tells us about our own ways of thinking than for anything specifically medieval.

⁷⁵ See also the contributions to this volume by Christine Bousquet-Labou  rie, Sarah Gordon, and Jean N. Goodrich.

⁷⁶ In political ideologies, for example; see Abraham Rotstein, “The World Upside Down,” *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory* 2.2 (1978): 5–30. See also Barbara Babcock, ed., *The Reversible World: Symbolic Inversion in Art and Society* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1978).

⁷⁷ See Katja Gvozdeva and Werner R  cke, ed., “*risus sacer – sacrum risibile*,” especially Jacques E. Merceron, “The Sacred and the Laughing Body in French Hagiographic and Didactic Literature of the Middle Ages,” 101–16. Other recent essay collections on this topic include *Rire des dieux*, ed. Dominique Bertrand and V  ronique G  ly-Ghedira (Clermont-Ferrand: Presses Universitaires Blaise Pascal, 2000), and *Komik und Sakralit  t: Aspekte einer   sthetischen Paradoxie in Mittelalter und fr  her Neuzeit*, ed. Anje Grebe and Nikolaus Staubach (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2005).

Chapter 5

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Women's Laughter and Gender Politics in Medieval Conduct Discourse

"Bodily control is an expression of social control."
(Mary Douglas)

"Hombres necios que acusáis
a la mujer sin razón
sin ver que seís la ocasión
de lo mismo que culpáis."
(Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, 1648–1695)¹

In contrast to a guarded and at times even negative view of laughter that characterizes the early medieval period, particularly monastic discourse,² the high and later Middle Ages may produce an impression of a time that embraces this

¹ "Foolish men are you who accuse the woman unjustly and don't realize that you are the very cause of that for which you blame her." All translations into English are my own unless specifically indicated otherwise.

² On early Christian and early medieval monastic views of laughter, see Gerhard Schmitz, "*quod rident homines, plorandum est*. Der 'Unwert' des Lachens in monastisch geprägten Vorstellungen der Spätantike und des frühen Mittelalters," *Stadtverfassung, Verfassungsstaat, Pressepolitik: Festschrift für Eberhard Naujoks zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Franz Quarthal and Wilfried Setzler (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1980), 3–15; Jacques Le Goff, "Le Rire dans les règles monastiques du Haut Moyen Âge," *Haut Moyen Âge: Culture, éducation et société. Etudes offertes à Pierre Riché*, ed. Claude Lepelly and Michel Sot (La Garenne-Colombes: Editions Publidix / Ed. européennes Erasme, 1990), 93–103; id., "Le Rire au Moyen Âge," *Cahier du Centre du recherches historiques* 3 (1989): 1–14; translated as "Laughter in the Middle Ages," *A Cultural History of Humour: From Antiquity to the Present Day*, ed. Jan Bremmer and Herman Roodenburg (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 1997), 40–60.

controversial human expression. And indeed, everything points to its greater acceptance: be it the frequent use of laughter and smiling in sculpture, the glorification of joy and harmony in secular courtly works, the phenomenon of carnival, or the very ubiquity of the word in contemporaneous literature. However, a closer look at written and artistic sources of this era quickly proves the erroneousness of this assumption: despite the appearance of greater approval, high- and late-medieval society's view of laughter remains complex and problematic, and is thus better described by Jacques Le Goff's succinct oxymoron "liberation and control."³ What seems to be a contradiction, in fact, reflects the constant tension between two diametrically opposed positions: one that makes a place for this emotional gesture and recognizes it as necessary or at least unavoidable; and one that is fixed on limiting it due to the relationship between laughter, corporeality, and virtue. This tension marks both clerical and lay writings of the period, but it is particularly obvious in the works dealing with women's laughter, such as the contemporary conduct literature.

The very existence of contradictory standpoints *per se* is, of course, nothing new to medievalists, whose work continues to attest to heterogeneity, heterodoxy, and richness of their time period.⁴ And yet, premodern texts discussing the subject of female laughter do more than merely reflect the debate between two opposing viewpoints. They prove that the anti- and pro-laughter discourses, while appearing to be mutually exclusive, are in fact *intertwined* in medieval courtly imagination. Furthermore, they reveal a reason behind this symbiotic existence: control of laughter in women's case represents patriarchal control over female sexuality. Almost nowhere does this manifest itself as clearly as in Ulrich von

³ Le Goff, "Le Rire au Moyen Âge," 5.

⁴ To name just a few, one has to point out the work of the historians Barbara H. Rosenwein (medieval emotions) and Ruth Mazo Karras (sexuality and masculinity), as well as the literary scholars such as Albrecht Classen (gender in didactic literature), Rüdiger Schnell (marriage), and James Schultz (desire, sexuality, and corporeality). See Barbara H. Rosenwein, "Worrying about Emotions in History," *The American Historical Review* 107.3 (2002): 821–45; Ruth Mazo Karras, *From Boys to Men: Formations of Masculinity in Late Medieval Europe*. The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), and eadem, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe: Doing unto Others* (New York: Routledge, 2005); Albrecht Classen, "Thomasin von Zerclaere's *Der Welsche Gast* and Hugo von Trimberg's *Der Renner*: Two Middle High German Didactic Writers Focus in Gender Relations," *What Nature Does Not Teach: Didactic Literature in the Medieval and Early-Modern Periods*, ed. Juanita Feros Ruys. Disputatio, 15 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), 205–29; Rüdiger Schnell, *Sexualität und Emotionalität in der vormodernen Ehe* (Cologne, Weimar, and Vienna: Böhlau, 2002), 159–200; James A. Schultz, "Love without Desire in Mären of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries," *Mittelalterliche Novellistik im europäischen Kontext: Kulturwissenschaftliche Perspektive*, ed. Mark Chinca, Tilmo Reuvekamp-Felber, and Christopher Young. Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie, 13 (Berlin: Schmidt, 2006), 122–47; and id., *Courtly Love, the Love of Courtliness, and the History of Sexuality* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

Liechtenstein's didactic work *Frauenbuch* (ca. 1257).⁵ The treatment that women's laughter receives in this text points to the interconnectedness between lay and clerical discourses and exposes an inherent contradiction within medieval society that places on women the unsatisfiable requirement to be virtuous and desirable at one and the same time.

Before proceeding to the textual analysis, it is important to clarify certain differences between the modern and medieval understanding of laughter. As Albrecht Classen mentions in his introduction to this volume, the word "laughter" has a wide semantic field in medieval vernaculars⁶—one, it should be added, that does not completely coincide with its contemporary counterpart. The most common vocabulary used to refer to both laughter and smiling are the Latin *ridere*, Old French *rire*, Middle English *laugh*, and Middle High German *lachen*; however, *subridere* and *sourire*, which are today's equivalents of the English "to smile," actually refer to "laughing up one's sleeve," i.e., to secret or malicious laughter.⁷ Similarly, the primary meaning of the Middle High German word *lecheln* is "to be disingenuously friendly"⁸; it transforms itself into the modern German *lächeln* ("to smile") only well into the early-modern period.⁹ The frequency of the Middle High

⁵ Abbreviated in citations as *FB*. Cited from Ulrich von Liechtenstein, *Frauenbuch*, ed. Franz Viktor Spechtler. Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik, 520 (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1989). Christopher Young's more recent edition of the text includes several valuable resources, such as a modern German translation, a commentary, and literary-historical information on the work, its genre, and its period; see Ulrich von Liechtenstein, *Das Frauenbuch: Mittelhochdeutsch, Neuhochdeutsch*, ed. and trans. Christopher Young (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2003). A thorough overview of medieval and early-modern conduct literature for women in German can be found in Susanne Barth, *Jungfrauenzucht: Literaturwissenschaftliche und pädagogische Studien zur Mädchenerziehungsliteratur zwischen 1200 und 1600* (Stuttgart: M & P Verlag für Wissenschaft und Forschung, 1994).

⁶ See earlier in this volume, Albrecht Classen, "Laughter as an Expression of Human Nature: Literary, Historical, Theological, Philosophical, and Psychological Reflections. Also an Introduction."

⁷ Le Goff, "Le Rire au Moyen Âge," 10. Also see Philippe Ménard, *Le Rire et le sourire dans le roman courtois en France au moyen âge (1150–1250)*. Publications romanes et françaises, 105 (Genève: Librairie Droz, 1969), 31, 430–31, respectively: "Il n'y a pas dans le vocabulaire médiéval d'opposition de sens entre rire et sourire . . . L'aire sémantique du mot *rire* englobe le *sourire*." On the same distinction in Middle English, see J. A. Burrow, *Gestures and Looks in Medieval Narrative*. Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature, 48 (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 76. For Italian, see Margarete Galler, "*Lachen und Lächeln*" in *poetischen Texten*. Europäische Hochschulschriften, Reihe I: Deutsche Sprache und Literatur, 1603 (Frankfurt am Main and New York: Peter Lang, 1997), 31–2.

⁸ "Auf hinterlistige Weise freundlich sein." Matthias Lexer, *Mittelhochdeutsches Handwörterbuch*, vol. 1 (Leipzig: Hirzel, 1872), 1849.

⁹ Galler, *Lachen und Lächeln*, 38; Karl Richard Kremer, "Das Lachen in der deutschen Sprache und Literatur des Mittelalters," Ph.D. diss., Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität zu Bonn, 1961, 28–43. The negative meaning of Middle High German *lecheln* is apparent in its derivative *lechelaere* (lit. "laughers"; it corresponds to modern "hypocrites"), which is used very frequently in courtly and didactic poetry. Lexer, *Handwörterbuch*, 1: 1849. Similarly, the Middle English word *smile*, derived from the Old English *smerian* "to laugh," does not acquire its present meaning and usage

German *smielen* and *smieren* is strikingly small compared to *lachen*. In courtly poetry the two verbs seem to provide a dialectal/regional alternative, used by only a handful of authors (including Ulrich von Liechtenstein himself), while in heroic epic they have an ability to acquire a very specific connotation of a performative type of smiling and create a stark contrast to the regular *lachen*, highlighting power relations between the characters.¹⁰ Since a clear semantic distinction between laughter and smiling does not develop until well into late-medieval and early-modern times, our modern translation of individual references to the medieval *ridere*, *rire*, *laugh*, and *lachen* is for the most part subjective and heavily dependent on the context, adverbial and adjectival modifiers. In this essay, when the meaning of *lachen* is not explicit, I use the words “laughing” and “smiling” interchangeably.

Composed in the mid-thirteenth century (ca. 1257¹¹), Ulrich von Liechtenstein’s *Frauenbuch* is a curious text representative of two popular genres. Its formal poetic characteristics place it firmly within the tradition of *Minnereden*, or allegories of love—texts that theorize and didacticize the debate on qualities and value of courtly love.¹² As many works of this kind, *Frauenbuch* is structured as a dispute overheard and resolved by the all-knowing male narrator (self-identified as Ulrich). It presents a discussion between a lady and a knight about the decline of courtesy in their world. Opening with a negative *Minnelehre* that reveals a complete failure of the fictional society to live up to the standards of courtliness, the poem concludes with Ulrich’s effort to restore courtly love to its proper place

before the fourteenth century.

¹⁰ Kathryn Starkey, “Brunhild’s Smile: Emotion and the Politics of Gender in the *Nibelungenlied*,” *Codierungen von Emotionen im Mittelalter: Emotions and Sensibilities in the Middle Ages*, ed. C. Stephen Jaeger and Ingrid Kasten. Trends in Medieval Philology, 1 (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2003), 159–73. Kremer provides several Middle High German synonyms of *lachen*: *grînen* (“to grin, to grimace”), *smutzel*n or *smutzen* (“to move one’s mouth in laughter”), *kachhazzen* / *kachen* / *kachezen* (“to laugh loudly”), *kutzen* (“to laugh”). *Lachen* is, however, by far the most common, and *grînen* is said to have been used mostly negatively. *Kachhazzen* / *kachezen* are Germanized derivatives from Latin *cachinnus* (“loud or violent laughter”). Kremer, “Das Lachen,” 40–42.

¹¹ *Frauenbuch* has been transmitted in a single extant manuscript, the famous *Ambraser Heldenbuch*, Codex Ser. nova 2664 (Österreichische Nationalbibliothek zu Wien). Ulrich von Liechtenstein, *Das Frauenbuch*, 37.

¹² Joachim Bumke, *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur im hohen Mittelalter* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 2000), 338–41; Thomas Cramer, *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur im späten Mittelalter*, 2nd ed. (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1995), 43–55. The most detailed study of *Minnereden* remains Ingeborg Glier, *Artes amandi: Untersuchung zu Geschichte, Überlieferung und Typologie der deutschen Minnereden*. Münchener Texte und Untersuchungen zur deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters, 34 (Munich: Beck, 1971). Also see Ludgar Lieb, “Eine Poetik der Wiederholung: Regeln und Funktionen der Minnerede,” *Text und Kultur: Mittelalterliche Literatur 1150–1450*, ed. Ursula Peters. Germanistische Symposien Berichtsbände, 23 (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2001), 506–28; and Christopher Young’s succinct introduction on *Minnereden* as a genre in Ulrich von Liechtenstein, *Das Frauenbuch*, 11–20.

and to convince the audience within and beyond the world of his text of the importance of such values as moderation, decorum, high-mindedness, joy, respect, and love service to smooth functioning of their society.¹³

It is easy to notice, however, that the discussion of love in *Frauenbuch* bears heavy didactic overtones. The speeches of the two male characters in particular (the knight and the narrator) make the work strongly reminiscent of prescriptive, or conduct, discourse—a large corpus of educational literature that flourished during the high and late Middle Ages, but whose roots go back to Graeco-Roman antiquity and biblical times.¹⁴ Ranging from shorter didactic poems to proverbial wisdom collections such as Freidank's *Bescheidenheit*, to long treatises like Thomasin of Zerclaere's *Der Welsche Gast*, Hugo of Trimberg's *Der Renner*, or Francesco da Barberino's *Reggimento e costumi di donna* that frequently combine etiquette rules with instructions concerning moral and spiritual improvement,¹⁵ conduct discourse addresses the subject of proper aristocratic comportment that is most succinctly summarized by Walther von der Vogelweide's iconic question *wie man zer werlte solte leben* (L 8,4; Schweikle 72; "how one should live in this world").¹⁶ The didactic nature of Ulrich's text is immediately apparent in its title: *Frauenbuch* is both "a book about ladies" and "a book for ladies," written upon request of the author's supposed patroness or beloved (*FB*, vv. 5–16, 2053–60) not so much for praise or entertainment as for instruction of courtly women on the subject of proper behavior.

It is telling that while Ulrich the narrator formally takes the female protagonist's side in the dispute, his criticism at the end of the work is directed at both the men,

¹³ See Glier, *Artes*, 41.

¹⁴ Roberta L. Krueger, "Introduction: Teach Your Children Well: Medieval Conduct Guides for Youths," *Medieval Conduct Literature: An Anthology of Vernacular Guides to Behaviour for Youths, with English Translations*, ed. Mark D. Johnston (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), xi–xvi.

¹⁵ For this essay, I do not find the strict distinction between "conduct" and "courtesy" literature productive. The latter is usually used to designate the texts dealing specifically with court etiquette, while the former functions as a broader and more inclusive term. Some scholars create even finer gradations within the courtesy discourse between "courtesy books proper" that address moral qualities and "etiquette manuals" that focus on behavior. Anna Dronzek rightfully points out that too strict an emphasis on the moral versus behavioral, internal versus external is not helpful nor necessary in the study of medieval conduct where external qualities, such as behavior or beauty, commonly reflect internal qualities (i.e., virtue or its lack). See Anna Dronzek, "Gendered Theories of Education in Fifteenth-Century Conduct Books," *Medieval Conduct*, ed. Kathleen Ashley and Robert L. A. Clark. *Medieval Cultures*, 29 (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 135–59, especially 137. For a detailed discussion of the term "courtesy" with a survey of medieval texts, see J. W. Nicholls, *The Matter of Courtesy: A Study of Medieval Courtesy Books and the Gawain-Poet* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Brewer, 1985).

¹⁶ Walther von der Vogelweide's verses are quoted according the standard practice of following Karl Lachmann's classification (marked as L). For the sake of convenience, I also quote the page numbers from Günther Schweikle's most recent standard edition: Walther von der Vogelweide, *Werke: Gesamtausgabe*, ed. Günther Schweikle (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1994), 2 vols.

who have failed to live up to the standards of courtliness, and the women, whom he reminds of their duty to be obedient to their male partners. Though written by an aristocratic layman rather than a religiously educated cleric, *Frauenbuch* combines the rhetorical elevation of women (*Frauenehre*), characteristic of lofty love song, and their simultaneous subordination that usually marks moral-didactic literature. Ulrich's text can thus be seen as a junction of both secular and clerical debates on conduct, virtue, and gender, particularly in regard to the place of laughter within the ideal of virtuous womanhood.

Women's laughter proves to be the truly central issue in *Frauenbuch*. Structurally, it bookends the work: the subject of joy and of its visual manifestation introduces and concludes the discussion of harmonious courtly existence. Conceptually, it is portrayed as both the principal cause of the moral decay in the fictional world of the text (the male perspective) and its symptom (the female position). The knight's accusations against the courtly women and the lady's defense of their behavior reveal contradictory models of femininity coexisting side by side and reflect two opposing medieval views of female laughter: one that encourages, or at least permits it, and one that condemns it. Ulrich's work demonstrates that what ultimately underlies both anti- and pro-laughter discourses is the patriarchal control of female sexuality: even though one side uses it to present laughter as a threat to female virtue and the other exploits its erotic potential, both equate the gesture with sexual availability.

The ideal for which the court in *Frauenbuch* strives is no different than in other medieval works: its positive state is supposed to be expressed visually in the smiling countenances of its knights and ladies. What the reader finds here, however, are men's cheerless faces and dejected mood—all clear signals that the fictional courtly world of the poem has lost its harmony. As the work unfolds, it becomes apparent that the ideal of joy (*vröide / freude*) is not only reflected in, but also maintained by the outward expressions of happiness.¹⁷ This is precisely why the knight places responsibility for the decline of courtliness on the lady's shoulders. Women, he asserts, no longer fulfill their duty of maintaining *freude*, because they refuse to welcome men with laughter:

die wile ir gen uns in hazze lebt
und uns antwurt ouch nicht gebt,
noch grüezet wol, noch lachet an,
von wiu solten wir dann freude han? (FB, vv. 145–48)

[Since you live feuding with us and do not respond to us, nor greet us, nor smile at us, in what should we find joy?]

¹⁷ For a detailed philological analysis of the medieval concept of joy, see Siegfried Christoph, "The Language and Culture of Joy," *Words of Love and Love of Words in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, ed. Albrecht Classen. Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 347 (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2008), 319–33.

Markedly, women in *Frauenbuch* bear responsibility not only for their own emotions but also for those of men.¹⁸ In order for society to function smoothly, the man says, "a maiden should be glad, maintain an elated state of mind, and do it cheerfully *at all times*" ("ein maget diu sol wesen fro / und ir gemüete tragen ho / und *zuo alle ziten* wol gemuot," *FB*, vv. 995–97; my italics). The discussion between the lady and the knight makes it clear that the affective side of *freude* is not the only necessary component of courtly harmony, but that the internal joy has to be revealed externally in the courtiers' smiling countenances.¹⁹ Women's refusal to display contentment, whether sincerely felt or merely performed, proves to be destructive: it is interpreted as a sign of animosity, discontent, and social discord that impacts men's own state of high-mindedness and consequently sends the world into a downward spiral. While this passage appears to refer to both affective and performative sides of *freude*, the true relevance of affect in this case may be called into question by the text's emphasis on its continuous display—"zuo alle ziten" ("at all times," *FB*, v. 997).

As the reader finds out later, no matter what trouble a woman has to face—a drunk or absent husband, loneliness, or vicious gossip—, she still has to smile, i.e., to perform courtly joy:

doch sol si darumb verzagen nicht . . .
 si sol mit andern sachen
 ir herze froelich machen,
 ir freude nicht verliesen.

(*FB*, vv. 957, 959–61)

[She must not despair because of that . . . She must make her heart glad with other things, she must not lose courtly joy.]

In difficult life situations, women are encouraged to seek consolation elsewhere lest they sink into low spirits. And yet it is ultimately the appearance of elatedness and contentment that proves to be crucial for the mood of their male partners. The demands of etiquette in *Frauenbuch* can be satisfied with the performance alone; as long as ladies fulfill their ornamental function at court, they ensure its smooth functioning.

The text makes clear why women's smiling and joyful faces are so important. In a world that favors and is based on procreation and sexuality, female smiles and physical beauty facilitate heterosocial ties, for a joyous, good-looking, and well-dressed woman is much more likely to attract male attention: "die wile ein wip wil haben man, / so sol si iren lip schone han" ("As long as a woman wants to find a man, she should remain beautiful," *FB*, vv. 369–70). The emphasis placed on

¹⁸ A similar phenomenon is present in Middle English courtesy books. See Gabriele Müller-Oberhäuser, "Gender, Emotionen und Modelle der Verhaltensregulierung in den mitttelenglischen *Courtesy Books*," *Querelles: Jahrbuch für Frauenforschung* 7 (2002): 27–51; here 27, 47.

¹⁹ This is how the lady senses the man's discontent as well, *FB*, vv. 54–55.

female attractiveness is by no means unique to *Frauenbuch*. The thirteenth-century medieval German poem *Winsbeckin* suggests that despite the heavy emphasis on virtue and modesty in courtly discourse, the primary duty of an aristocratic female is to be desirable: “so man gedenket oft an dich / und wünschet dîn, sô bistû wert” (“If men often think of you and desire you, then you are worthy”; *Winsbeckin*, vv. 15, 9–10).²⁰ This opinion is supported by other prescriptive works as well. Alice Hentsch’s overview of medieval European conduct literature for women shows that aristocratic females are taught to know “how to make others desire [them].”²¹ For example, *Winsbeckin*’s rough contemporary, Thomasin von Zerclaere makes a point to state in his treatise *Der Welsche Gast* (ca. 1215–1216) that those who fail to learn this skill will pay by being forgotten:

Ein frowe sol sich sehen lân,
chuomt zir ein vremeder man,
swelichiu sich niht sehen lat,
diu sol ûz ir chemenat
sîn allenthalben unerchant,
buezze also, sî ungenant.

(*Welsche Gast*, vv. 391–96)²²

[A lady should let herself be looked upon, if a noble man approaches her. She who would not let herself be seen, will remain unknown outside of her bower. May this be her punishment, may she remain unknown!]

It is not surprising then that in this worldview laughter will also be harnessed to enhance a woman’s value as an attractive love object, to satisfy society’s need for eroticism and seductiveness, and assure smooth interaction between the sexes. Contemporaneous epic and lyric do not conceal the fact that gentle laughter makes a woman attractive and appealing in men’s eyes. Similarly, medieval and early-modern conduct manuals written in various vernacular languages indicate that as long as laughter does not interfere with a woman’s most treasured

²⁰ “Winsbeckin,” *Winsbeckische Gedichte nebst Tirol und Fridebrant*, ed. Albert Leitzmann and Ingo Reiffenstein, 3rd ed. Altdeutsche Textbibliothek, 9 (1888; Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1962), 46–66. Also see Joachim Bumke, *Courtly Culture: Literature and Society in the High Middle Ages*, trans. Thomas Dunlap (1986; Woodstock, NY: Overlook, 2000), 337: “Female beauty and virtue were not values in themselves, but served to please and encourage men.” The degree of reflection of patriarchal ideology in *Winsbeckin* is debated in the two most important studies on this text by Ann Marie Rasmussen, “‘If Men Desire You, Then You Are Worthy’: The Didactic Mother-Daughter Poem Die Winsbeckin,” *Mothers and Daughters in Medieval German Literature* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1997), esp. 143; and recently by Albrecht Classen, *The Power of a Woman’s Voice in Medieval and Early Modern Literatures: New Approaches to German and European Women Writers and to Violence Against Women in Premodern Times*. Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture, 1 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2007), esp. 159–86.

²¹ “Une femme doit savoir se faire désirer.” Alice A. Hentsch, *De la littérature didactique du Moyen Âge s’adressant spécialement aux femmes* (1903; Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1975), 47.

²² Cited according to Thomasin von Zerclaere, *Der Welsche Gast*, ed. F. W. von Kries, vol. 1. Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik, 425 (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1984–1985), 4 vols.

possession—her physical beauty—it actually increases her social value. For this reason, they seek to define an ideal form of laughter, discouraging prolonged or loud outbursts, but quite approving of “a little laugh, sweet and brief, with the mouth semi-open between two little charming dimples.”²³ Texts like the Old French translation of Ovid's *Ars Amandi*, known as *La Clef d'amors* (ca. 1280), or Robert de Blois' *Chastoiment des Dames* (ca. 1226) prove to be less interested in the inherent goodness or evilness of laughter and more in its aesthetic value. Instead of insisting on a complete avoidance of laughter, De Blois, for example, advises his female readers to take simple precautions if their mannerisms are less than perfect:

Et devant totes genz de pris
se vos avez maul plaisant ris,
sanz blasme vostre main poez
metre devant quant vos riez. (Chastoiment, vv. 369–72)²⁴

[And if you have an unpleasant laugh, you may do well by covering your mouth with your hand when you laugh in front of people.]

He is later echoed by Francesco da Barberino (1264–1348) in his *Reggimento e costumi di donna* as well as by the fifteenth-century Middle English poem *How the good wiif taughte hir doughtir*:

Laughe thou not to loude, ne yane thou not to wide
but laughe thou softe and myelde. (Good wiif, vv. 56–67)

[Do not laugh too loud or yawn too wide, but instead laugh softly and mildly.]

sa d'alcul sollazzo
ridere le convegna,
non gridi: a! a!, né con simili voci,
però che con ciò faria mostrar li denti,
che non è cosa conta; ma, senza alcun romore,
sembranza vaccia d'alcuna allegrezza. (Reggimento, 137)

[If something amusing makes her laugh, she must not scream: “Ah, hah!” or something similar, because in doing this she would show her teeth, which is not proper; rather, without any sound, she should offer a joyful appearance.]²⁵

²³ “Un petit rire doux et court, à bouche entr'ouverte avec deux jolies petites fossettes.” Hentsch, *De la littérature*, 89.

²⁴ Cited according to Robert de Blois, *Chastoiment des Dames*, in Robert de Blois: *Son oeuvre didactique et narrative*, ed. John Howard Fox (Paris: Librairie Nizet, 1950), 132–55. Also see Hentsch, *De la littérature*, 89: “Si on a un vilain rire s'efforcer de ne pas rire.”

²⁵ Both the original texts and the translations are cited according to “The English *How the good wiif taughte hir doughtir* and *How the wise man taught his sonne*,” ed. and trans. Claire Sponsler, in *Medieval Conduct Literature*, 285–304, here 290; “The Italian *Reggimento e costumi di donna* (Selections) and *Documenti d'amore* (Selections) of Francesco da Barberino,” ed. and trans. Eleonora Stoppino, *Medieval Conduct Literature*, 127–83; here 137. For a detailed analysis of Barberino's didactic work, see Susanna Burghartz, “Ehebruch und eheherrliche Gewalt:

The mere act of laughing does not always automatically imply a lack of propriety: a woman just has to be cautious about *when* and *how* she laughs. In this respect, these seemingly positive texts partake in the ideology of courtly love as a man's game of domination and subordination. Smiling or gentle laughter can be encouraged as long as they promote a woman's ornamental function and do not affect her beauty, seen as a marker of both female virtue and attractiveness. Female behavior is acceptable as long as it arouses men's desire and does not endanger the harmony at court.

This is precisely where Ulrich's ladies are said to have failed. They purportedly cause their society to crumble because men no longer perceive them as alluring. E. Jane Burns's noteworthy conclusion that in medieval French literature "a female identity . . . exists as corporeality alone"²⁶ is equally true for *Frauenbuch*, for it is always the female body that the male speaker is dissatisfied with in one way or another. He complains about the women's physical appearance, body language, and even clothes, all of which no longer invite the men's eyes to linger on their charms, thus stimulating desire:

den lip ir alle unschone hant,
daz git uns hohes muotes nicht.
wo unser dhainer ein frawen sicht,
die sitzet sam ein swester si,
wer solt der gerne wesen bi? . . .
Ir lat an iuch nicht anders sehen
mit willen wann der ougen prehen.

(FB, vv. 237–38)

[You keep yourself so unattractive that you do not inspire us any longer. Whenever one of us sees a woman, she usually sits there like a sister [nun], so who would wish to stay with her? . . . You do not let us see anything else of you other than the gleam of your eyes.]

He criticizes women for refusing to laugh, controlling their movements and emotions, and concealing their bodies with modest clothing and their faces with veils, i.e., for what Ingrid Bennewitz sees as too closely conforming to the precepts for modest behavior advocated in contemporaneous clerical writings.²⁷ What this

Literarische und außerliterarische Bezüge im 'Ritter vom Turn,'" in *Ordnung und Lust: Bilder von Liebe, Ehe und Sexualität in Spätmittelalter und Früher Neuzeit*, ed. Hans-Jürgen Bachorski. Literatur, Imagination, Realität, 1 (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 1991), 123–40.

²⁶ E. Jane Burns, *Bodytalk: When Women Speak in Old French Literature*. The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 3.

²⁷ "Die Aussage, dass die weiblichen Körper zu genau jene Vorschriften internalisiert haben, die in der moralisch-didaktischen Literatur eingefordert werden: das Senken des Kopfes, das Niederschlagen der Augen, das Verstummen beim Anblick und in Gegenwart eines Mannes." Ingrid Bennewitz, "Der Körper der Dame: Zur Konstruktion von 'Weiblichkeit' in der deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters," *'Aufführung' und 'Schrift' in Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit*, ed. Jan-Dirk

reading does not take into account, however, is the tension between the two views of femininity presented by the text, which becomes obvious only when one looks at it through the prism of laughter.

Aristocratic women in this text face a dilemma: despite the expressed necessity for joy and smiles, they have to be wary of the effect their laughter has on men. As Bennewitz rightly observes and as the female protagonist herself points out, the courtly world in Ulrich's work is not governed by secular ideals alone. The very behavior being urged upon women is at the same time to be avoided, for the courtly men have also internalized the contemporary *clerical* views of laughter, femininity, and virtue.²⁸

As Le Goff points out, the medieval "codification of laughter and its condemnation . . . result partly at least from its dangerous relationship with the body"²⁹—the relationship which was noticed by ancient civilizations and was largely rejected by the Judeo-Christian tradition.³⁰ Inspired by several books of the Old and New Testament, particularly Ecclesiastes 2:2, 7:4, 7:6, Luke 6:21–25, and James 4:9–10,³¹ patristic and early monastic writings connect laughter to eschatological and apocalyptic discourse and debate its place within the ideal of virtuous Christian behavior. Early theologians and ascetics see indulgence in hilarity as a proof of worldliness and short-sightedness, while interpreting its

Müller. Germanistische Symposien Berichtsbände, 17 (Stuttgart and Weimar: Metzler, 1996), 222–38; here 231.

²⁸ The restrictions placed on female bodies are at their most extreme in the case of the aristocracy, for the behavior of women of lower birth is not as strictly regulated. Barberino, for example, points out consistently that noble women are held to a higher standard than other social groups. See Krueger, "Introduction," xviii. Also Hentsch, *De la littérature*, 107. Medieval conduct texts thus support and anticipate the anthropologist Mahadev Apte's conclusion about the correlation between corporeal and emotional control and the socio-economic status: "Where ideal sex-role models for women emphasize modesty, passivity, and politeness, it is considered unbecoming for women to laugh in an unrestrained manner." Mahadev L. Apte, *Humor and Laughter: An Anthropological Approach* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), 259.

²⁹ "La codification et condamnation du rire dans le milieu monastique résultent au moins en partie de sa dangereuse liaison avec le corps." Le Goff, "Le Rire au Moyen Âge," 7.

³⁰ On laughter in ancient Egypt and Israel and Graeco-Roman antiquity, see Ingvild Saelid Gilhus, *Laughing Gods, Weeping Virgins: Laughter in the History of Religion* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), esp. 9–59.

³¹ "I said of laughter, 'It is mad,' and of pleasure, 'What use is it?'" (Eccles. 2:2); "The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth" (Eccles. 7:4); and "For like the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of fools; this also is vanity" (Eccles. 7:6); "Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. . . . Woe to you who are laughing, for you will mourn and weep" (Luke 6:21 and 6:25 respectively); "Lament and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy into dejection. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you" (James 4:9–10).

rejection as a manifestation of wisdom and virtue.³² Medieval monastic rules portray laughter as a literal threat to bodily integrity in very vivid terms, speaking of “the bolt of the mouth” and “the barrier of the teeth,” necessary to contain this dangerous power that is always ready to burst forth.³³ Although for both genders succumbing to laughter (and even to smiling) could be interpreted as evidence of moral and physical corruption, the misogynous view of female nature as inherently more susceptible to sin makes the discussion of women’s emotions particularly poignant. The patristic authors establish a topos linking laughter to carnal desire and consequently the lack of chastity, the most treasured possession for a woman if she wants to gain her salvation: for Ambrose when “laughter creeps in,” “boldness breaks forth . . . and bashfulness is lessened”³⁴; in Clement of Alexandria’s opinion, “to children and women especially laughter is the cause of slipping into scandal”³⁵; and John Chrysostom and Jerome are wary even of smiling, sharing Ambrose’s view that the laughter of virgins is perilous to their modesty.³⁶

What was originally intended for a select group of people consecrated to God, however, endures well beyond late antiquity and the early Middle Ages. The views of the Church Fathers live on in high- and late-medieval theological writings

³² The message is particularly strong in the writings of Benedict of Aniane, Jerome, St. Augustine, John Chrysostom, and Clement of Alexandria. Primary sources may be found in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church: Series 1 and 2*, ed. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978–1979), 14 vols (each series); *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and Arthur Cleveland Coxe (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978–1981), 10 vols; *Patrologiae cursus completus, sive bibliotheca universalis, integra, uniformis, commoda, oeconomica, omnium SS. Patrum, doctorum, scriptorumque ecclesiasticorum qui ab aevo apostolico ad usque Innocentii III tempora floruerunt . . .* [Series Latina, in qua prodeunt Patres, doctores scriptoresque Ecclesiae Latinae, a Tertulliano ad Innocentium III], ed. Jacques-Paul Migne and A.-G. Hamman (Paris: Migne, 1844–1864), 221 vols. Abbreviated henceforth as *NPNF* 1 and 2, *ANF*, and *PL*. For an overview of patristic debate on laughter see Schmitz, “quod rident homines, plorandum est”; Irvén M. Resnick, “‘Risus monasticus’: Laughter and Medieval Monastic Culture,” *Revue Bénédictine* 97 (1987): 90–100.

³³ See, for example, the sixth-century Italian *Rule of the Master* (*Regula magistri*) in Le Goff, “Le Rire au Moyen Âge,” 8. Also see Gilhus, *Laughing Gods*, 63. For the Benedictine Rule, see “Benediktinerregel,” *Die kleineren althochdeutschen Sprachdenkmäler*, ed. Elias von Steinmeyer, 2nd ed. Deutsche Neudrucke: Reihe Texte des Mittelalters (1916; Berlin: Weidmannsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1963), 190–289; translated in *Readings in Medieval History*, ed. Patrick Geary, 3rd ed. (1989; Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 2003), 168–98.

³⁴ Cf. Ch. III in St. Ambrose, *Concerning Virgins, To Marcellina, His Sister. Book III*, in *NPNF* 2.10: 381–85.

³⁵ Clement of Alexandria, “Paedagogus (The Instructor),” *ANF* 2: 250.

³⁶ John Chrysostom, *On Virginity. Against Remarriage*, trans. Sally Rieger Shore and Elizabeth A. Clarik. *Studies in Women and Religion*, 9 (Lewiston, NY, and Toronto: Mellen, 1983), 100. Also see Gilhus, *Laughing Gods*, 6.

and homiletic literature, and find their reflection in conduct tradition as well.³⁷ Medieval authors "selectively reproduce the past," to use Clare Lees' succinct description³⁸: they align themselves with a preexisting and well-known tradition and also actively reshape it. The early texts provide the later thinkers with legitimacy and authority, while being simultaneously adapted for a new audience—medieval laity.³⁹ As Roberta Krueger observes, although the clerical authors of conduct manuals may have theoretically considered women to be men's spiritual equals under God, many of their writings make ample use of and help to promote the view of women "as intellectually and morally inferior."⁴⁰ The belief that female nature is more corruptible and sexual and therefore in need of more stringent control resonates throughout conduct discourse as evidenced by Vincent de Beauvais's thirteenth-century treatise *De eruditione filiorum nobilium* (*On Education of Noble Children*): "Filij tibi sunt, erudi illos . . . Filie tibi sunt, serua corpus illarum et non ostendas hilarem faciem tuam ad illas. Serua . . . corpus illarum in etate puellari que prona est lasciuie" ("If sons are given to you, educate them . . . If daughters are given to you, guard their body and do not reveal your joyous face to them. Guard their bodies in the age of maidenhood, which is prone to licentiousness").⁴¹

While instruction of male children should focus on developing their minds through formal education, it is the body and its sexual virtue that must be paid attention to in the case of female progeny. Unsurprisingly, de Beauvais's views on the education of girls reveal strong influence of Jerome's and Augustine's writings on virginity. Echoing these patristic authorities, the last ten chapters of Vincent's book emphasize the importance of the strongest bodily restraint possible, issue familiar warnings against a willful demeanor, roaming eyes, unbridled tongues,

³⁷ To name just a few, see Hildegard von Bingen's *Causae et curae*, Thomas Aquinas' *Summa*, and Berthold von Regensburg's German sermons. For their overview, see Olga V. Trokhimenko, "Keeping up Appearances: Women's Laughter and the Performance of Virtue in Medieval German Discourse," Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 2006, 90–157. In conduct discourse, the echoes of Ecclesiastes and Luke are obvious in the texts by Thomasin von Zerclaere, Hugo von Trimberg, and Teichner who speak of foolishness and the diabolical nature of laughter: *Renner*, vv. 6395–87; *Welsche Gast*, vv. 11067–70, 10878–81, and 1149–63; Teichner in #34 "Von der chonschaft," v. 23. Cited from Hugo von Trimberg, *Der Renner*, ed. Günther Ehrismann, vol. 2 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1970); *Die Gedichte Heinrichs des Teichners*, ed. Heinrich Niewöhner. Deutsche Texte des Mittelalters, 44–46 (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1953–1956), 44: 40–41.

³⁸ Clare Lees, *Tradition and Belief: Religious Writing in Late Anglo-Saxon England*. Medieval Cultures, 19 (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 19–45. Roberta Krueger agrees with Lees and compares conduct discourse to a palimpsest, emphasizing that conduct texts "absorb traditional teachings rather than break with the past." Krueger, "Introduction," xii.

³⁹ As Lees justly points out, the later texts go beyond mere reworking of the patristic works. Lees, *Tradition*, 27.

⁴⁰ Krueger, "Introduction," xvii.

⁴¹ Vincent of Beauvais, *De eruditione filiorum nobilium*, ed. Arpad Steiner. The Mediaeval Academy of America Publication, 32 (Cambridge, MA: The Mediaeval Academy of America, 1938), 172.

wanton laughter, jeering or buffoon-like jesting, and an indecent disposition, and finally, reiterate Ambrose's famous verdict that social interaction leads to laughter and diminished modesty.⁴²

De Beauvais's gendered approach to aristocratic education is commonplace among conduct texts. A comparison of manuals for boys with those for girls proves what Anna Dronzek terms "physicalization of women's honor": a woman's reputation is treated as a consequence of her bodily purity and any form of female behavior is examined through the prism of sexual chastity.⁴³ The popular topos that conflates two female orifices—the mouth and the vagina—makes laughter much more threatening to the virtue of women than of men: for the opening of one orifice is commonly interpreted as a symbolic opening of the other.⁴⁴ Conspicuously, the statues of a Foolish Virgin and of the treacherous and seductive Frau Welt grin on the portals of Gothic cathedrals in Strassburg and Worms, and a rebellious wife in Marquard von Stein's *Ritter von Turm* is caught one night in a compromising position—"sitting with two lads, eating, and laughing" ("by zweyen knechten sitzen essen und gelechter triben").⁴⁵

The lady in *Frauenbuch* is very much aware of the clerical equation "laughing woman equals sexually open woman" and shows that men in her society are

⁴² "Non sit [. . .] uobis improbus uultus, non oculi uagi, non infrenis lingua, non petulans risus, non scurrilis iocus, non indecens habitus . . ."; "'Teritur,' inquit, 'officiis pudor, audacia emicat, risus subrepat, modestia soluitur dum urbanitas affectatur.'" Vincent of Beauvais, *De eruditione*, 192, 194 respectively. One cannot help but note Thomasin von Zerclaere's numerous restrictions imposed on aristocratic women by the rules of etiquette. See *Welsche Gast*, vv. 405–50. Similar sentiments are expressed later in the fourteenth-century treatise *Le Ménagier de Paris*. See *The Goodman of Paris: A Treatise on Moral and Domestic Economy by a Citizen of Paris, c. 1393*, trans. Eileen Power (1928; Woodridge: Boydell Press, 2006), esp. 50.

⁴³ Dronzek, "Gendered Theories," 149. The truth of Dronzek's observation becomes clear in the two key concepts of medieval elite self-fashioning, *êre* and *zuht*, which acquire different shades of meaning when they refer to different genders. The medieval *êre* (honor) primarily connotes an individual's prestige or reputation in the world, while *zuht* ("breeding, upbringing, education, good manners") represents "the virtue of self-restraint." However, in the texts intended for men, such as *Winsbecke*, *zuht* stands for rational control over one's social image and corresponds to the modern English "self-control, self-discipline." It becomes, however, sexualized when it is directed at women, referring not only to proper courteous behavior, but also to modesty and even chastity. The discussion of gendered aspects of *zuht* and *êre* can be found in Ann Marie Rasmussen and Olga Trokhimenko, "The German *Winsbecke*, *Winsbeckin*, and *Winsbecke* Parodies (Selections)" in *Medieval Conduct Literature*, 66–67.

⁴⁴ The motif of conflation of the two female mouths is explored in Burns, *Bodytalk*; Lisa Perfetti, *Women and Laughter in Medieval Comic Literature* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 2003); and Trokhimenko, "Keeping," 24–89. The natural-philosophical aspect of this conflation is analyzed by Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990).

⁴⁵ Marquard vom Stein, *Der Ritter vom Turn*, ed. Ruth Harvey. *Texte des späten Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit*, 32 (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 1988), 94. It is unclear which transgression is emphasized more here: a transgression of class or sexual immodesty. In Middle High German, *knecht* can mean both "a young man" and "a male servant."

familiar with it as well. She complains about constantly running the risk that her every look and gesture might be misconstrued as a sign of sexual interest or conjugal infidelity:

welch frawe iuch nu güetlich an sicht,
ir jehet, si hab ez durch daz getan,
si welle iuch minnen für iren man.
davon si wir in huote
mit lib und ouch mit muote
gen iuch als uns des twinget not
wir wæren anders an eren tot.

(*FB*, vv. 310–16)

[Now, if a lady looks at you kindly, you say that she has done so because she wishes to love you instead of her husband. For that reason we are on our guard against you, guarding both our bodies and our minds, as we are forced to do. Otherwise, our honor would be dead.]

Similarly, a woman's well-intended laughter can also be used to reduce her to a rampant libido. The lady warns, "Welchez wip gern ere welle han, / diu sol iuch nicht lachen an" ("The woman who would wish to keep her honor, should not laugh/smile at you," *FB*, vv. 205–06), and explains why:

ob iuch ein frawe gruozte,
den gruoze mit lachen suozte,
ir daecht also: 'si ist mir holt, . . .
si mag wol sin ein gaehez wip . . .
Si hat gegen mir licht minne gir' . . .
ist aber daz ein schoeniu maget,
der lip von rechte wol behaget,
tanzet unde lachet
und sich icht schoene an machet,
so gicht man des, si si ze palt,
si werde in eren nimmer alt.

(*FB*, vv. 185–87, 191, 194, 821–26)

[Should a woman greet you and sweeten her greeting with laughter, you would think: "She is well-disposed towards me . . . She may well be a hasty woman . . . She must desire my love . . ." When it so happens that a beautiful maiden, whose body is truly pleasing, dances and laughs/smiles, and adorns herself a little bit, it is said at once that she is too daring and that her honor will not grow old.]

The last quote, taken from two quite separate passages, is just one of many examples of how Ulrich's *Frauenbuch* anticipates the twentieth-century feminist position that women's bodies are commonly perceived as "speaking" a language of provocation, that "when female bodies do not efface their femaleness, they may

be seen as inviting, ‘flaunting.’”⁴⁶ For a woman, failing to use utmost caution in her interaction with the other gender and to control her body results in immediate sexualization, in a projection onto her of the male onlookers’ own urges and fantasies. To make matters worse, nobody is safe from gossip in this society, no matter what age or status—married or single, maidens, wives, or widows:

dise not nu lident alliu wip.
 wie solte ein wip da bi iren lip
 behüeten vor dem spot also,
 daz si dannoch da bi waer fro? (FB, vv. 845–48)

[This is the trouble that all women suffer. How should a woman protect herself from ridicule and still remain joyful at the same time?]

Women in Ulrich’s *Frauenbuch* are clearly placed in an impossible situation. When in their attempt to earn respect and appreciation they choose to follow clerical advice and perform virtue by forfeiting laughter, they are accused of destroying the harmony of the secular world. However, when they try to maintain this world with their friendly courtliness, the misogynist clerical rhetoric marks them as unchaste. The incompatibility of the two demands—to be virtuous and seductive at the same time—so clearly shown in *Frauenbuch*, was noticed by Ulrich’s contemporaries as well. Robert de Blois empathizes with women of his time, pointing out that “because of that a woman does not know what to do” (“por ce ne set dame que faire,” *Chastoiment*, v. 27),⁴⁷ while the female speaker in a poem by the minnesinger Burkhart von Hohenvels, laments:

Wie sol ich sælig wîp
 den liuten nû gebâren,
 daz ich mûg ir nâchrede wol gestillen,
 sît daz in sin noch lîp
 niht kan gelîche vâren?
 daz ir doch viere hæten einen willen!
 nieman siht gelîches iht. (KLD XIII.1,1–7)⁴⁸

[How should I, a chaste woman, behave nowadays towards people so that I might silence their slander since, according to them, minds and bodies do not desire the same thing? If only four of them were of one mind about it! Nobody sees things the same way . . .]

⁴⁶ Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture and the Body* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), 6.

⁴⁷ Cf. the editor’s summary of vv. 27–66 in Fox’s introduction to de Blois’s works: “Difficulté qu’éprouve la dame à régler sa conduite dans la société, car si elle se montre courtoise, les hommes disent que c’est par amour et n’hésitent pas à en abuser. D’autre part, si elle manque à la courtoisie en refusant d’accueillir les gens, on l’accuse d’orgueil.” *Robert de Blois*, 24.

⁴⁸ KLD is a standard scholarly abbreviation for *Deutsche Liederdichter des 13. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Carl von Kraus, vol. 1 (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1952–1958), 2 vols.

Unsurprisingly, men represented in *Frauenbuch* by the knight deny the contradiction between the clerical and courtly views of women's laughter and sexuality. The lady's opponent does not see it as inherent to his society, but rather attributes all the injustices to several bad apples. At the end of the book, however, his own words betray his susceptibility to clerical influence. When reminded by the narrator of his duty as a courtier to obey and respect ladies, the knight accuses the mediator of bias in women's favor and resorts to the old misogynist cliché that women are fickle and must be kept under control:

Da sprach der ritter al zehant:
 'herr, mir waz daz e bekant,
 daz ir den frawen zuo gestat.
 ja waz ez ie iuwer rat,
 daz den frawen alle man
 mit dienste waeren undertan
 und tuon recht waz si wolten.
 ob wir man alle solten
 tuon daz frawen diuchte guot,
 so gewunnen si grozen übermuot.
 des mugen wir iuch gevolgen nicht.'

(FB, vv. 1949–59)

[Then the knight spoke at once: "My lord, it has been known to me for a long time that you stand by women. It has always been your advice that all men should be subject to ladies in service and do whatever they wish. If all of us, men, were to do whatever would seem good to women, they would become too arrogant. For that reason, we must not follow your advice."]

Neither is he willing to recognize men's share of responsibility for the decline of chivalry. It is his female opponent who has to his call attention to the discrepancy between reality and the standards of courtliness. From the modern point of view, her mode of analysis is much more sophisticated and more abstract: while the knight personalizes the problem, the lady sees it as a structural issue. She objects to the demand to perform joy at all costs and points out that men are far from fulfilling their side of the bargain. Since laughter makes women more beautiful, approachable, and desirable, then in an ideal society it must function as a reward, as an expression of welcome and appreciation of men's sacrifices. Through the use of the common trope *laudatio temporis acti* (praise of olden times), the lady shows how crucial aspects of the courtly ideology, such as service (*Frauendienst*) and honoring women (*Frauenehre*), have been ignored by men:

warumbe sol
 ein frawe, die man nu grüezzen, wol
 mit spilnden ougen lachen an?
 mit welhen dingen (dienent) man,
 daz si die frawen grüezen,

den gruoz mit lachen süezen?
 mir ist gesaget, daz e die man
 die frawen gütlichen lachten an,
 daz si wurden als hochgemuot,
 daz si den lip und ouch daz guot
 zerten durch uns williklich
 und von uns wurden muotes rîch
 und waren der tat unverzaget . . .

(FB, vv. 151–63)

[Why should a woman, greeted by a man, smile at him with frolicking eyes? How exactly do men serve that ladies should greet them and sweeten their greeting with laughter? I was told that in the past, men, at whom the ladies smiled kindly, used to become so high-minded that they would willingly risk their lives and their possessions because of us, and were ennobled by us, and did not fear deeds . . .]⁴⁹

In the idealized past, when all components of the courtly way of life were in place, women are said to have been able to smile out of joy or gratitude, for men knew then that they had earned these smiles as a reward and as a warrant of an even better recompense later. In such a perfect world, the woman suggests, in which there is trust and good-will on both sides, clerical rhetoric about female fallibility should have no place, for there would be no need to spy on women and misinterpret their signs of affection.

Although the *Frauenbuch* so powerfully highlights the tension between the clerical and courtly views of women's laughter and sexuality, it resolves this contradiction in a rather conservative way.⁵⁰ In order to steer the characters within the fictional universe of his text and his contemporaries outside it back toward the ideals of love service (*Minnedienst*), the narrator takes the lady's side, bestows lavish praise on all women, and reaffirms their inherent goodness; and yet the only true solution that his work is able to offer is to establish that women must adhere to their traditional gender roles. Ulrich's explicit verdict proclaims that in order for the society to function harmoniously, women must live up to men's expectations and recognize their authority:

Ich sprach: 'fraw, ich muoz des jehen,
 was ich ie frawen han gesehen,
 dar zuo aller hande wip,

⁴⁹ Ulrich is definitely not the only author addressing the subject of love service versus its rewards, and of appearance versus virtue. A very poignant critique is found in the manuscript version J of *Winsbecken* (mgf 474; ca. 1300). See Olga V. Trokhimenko, "On the Dignity of Women: The 'Ethical Reading' of *Winsbecken* in mgf 474, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin—Preussischer Kulturbesitz," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 107.4 (2008): 490–505.

⁵⁰ Albeit without explanation or textual evidence, Ulrich Müller and Franz Viktor Spechtler express a similar opinion in "Ulrich von Liechtenstein," *German Literature of the High Middle Ages*, ed. Will Hasty. The Camden House History of German Literature, 3 (Rochester, NY: Camden House, and Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2006), 234–41; here 239.

der guot, der leben und ouch ir lip
 muoz sin den mannen undertan.
 da von muoz ich iuch zuo gestan.
 diu wip müezen beide tuon und lan
 an allen dingen waz wir man
 wellen und uns dunket guot.
 welhez wip des nicht gütlichen tuot,
 diu muoz ez tuon, daz ist also.

(*FB*, vv. 1930–41)

[I said: "My lady, I have to tell you this: whatever I have seen of ladies and of all kinds of women, their possessions, their livelihood, and also their bodies must be subject to men. For this reason I entreat you: women must do and allow everything that we, men, desire and that seems good to us. The woman, who would not do it willingly, has to do it nevertheless. That is how things are.]

The poet conveys a similar message rhetorically, through his carefully and strategically constructed argument. Having initially impressed the audience with her power and readiness to voice her concerns, the lady slowly transforms herself into the man's pupil, asking him to teach her how to discern good men from evil ones and how to lead a virtuous life. In addition, the man's yielding in their dispute represents, as Helen Solterer has pointed out, the Ovidian model of symbolic domination and is a common, pan-European device to achieve a true victory. The man's seeming submission, ironically, symbolizes the woman's defeat: "The man's obeisance correlates with the ultimate aim of the woman yielding. Representing the man as temporarily submissive is meant to signify his ultimate dominance. The master-narrator's contention is this: to defer from a position of power can offer, paradoxically, a means of exerting it."⁵¹

Both the knight and the narrator achieve this symbolic dominance through acknowledging the authority of women. The man does so by agreeing to respect ladies while receiving in return a promise of their obedience. Ulrich presents himself as a humble servitor, a vassal to his lady-love to whom he has always been *ze dienst vil bereit* ("ever ready to serve," *FB*, v. 13); and yet his humility does not prevent him from composing a *püechelin* (both "a little book" and a didactic work written in a form of a debate or disputation), aptly named *Der frawen puech*, which is intended to educate his female audience about the correct manner of interacting with men.⁵² While Ulrich's support of women can be seen as an acknowledgement

⁵¹ Helen Solterer, *The Master and Minerva: Disputing Women in French Medieval Culture* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995), 38.

⁵² See *FB*, vv. 2125–34. On Ulrich's self-proclaimed vassalage of love, also see *FB*, vv. 15–16: "ich bin ir staete dienstman / mit triuwen als ich beste kan" ("I am her loyal vassal / as loyal as I can [be].") On the genre of *buechlein*, see Bumke, *Geschichte*, 148; Marion Gibbs and Sidney M. Johnson, *Medieval German Literature* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 154; cf. also Wolf Gewehr, "'Klage-Büchlein' als Gattungsproblem," *Zeitschrift für Deutsche Philologie* 91 (1972): 1–16; Klaus Hufeland, "Das 'sogenannte zweite Büchlein,'" *Bickelwort und wildiu maere: Festschrift für Eberhard Nellmann*

of their predicament, the purpose of his text is to teach them “how to inhabit the socio-sexual function that is expected of them . . . a notion of female identity that depends on the female’s becoming an attractive and compliant object of male desire.”⁵³ The female audiences in Ulrich’s text and beyond are thus left to be ever-mindful that their laughter and sexual virtue are closely connected and that the harmony in their societies heavily depends on the perfect and willing control of female bodies.

In her introduction to a recent collection on medieval and early-modern didactic literature, Juanita Feros Ruys raises the issue of correlation between textual advice and actual behavior, between the standard these works advocated and the reality they strove to influence.⁵⁴ Her concern is echoed by Roberta Krueger, who warns against reading conduct texts “as snapshots of medieval life.”⁵⁵ Indeed, it would be naïve to argue that the comportment conduct literature prescribed was diligently followed, that the power structures these texts advocated were unquestioningly embraced and implemented, and that there was no resistance or objections to the misogyny, inconsistencies, and contradictions that mark much of this discourse.⁵⁶ It would be equally unreasonable to deny the existence of strong female personages, both historical and fictional, whose behavior, intelligence, or authority did not exactly match the image of perfect but passive and submissive femininity often inscribed in prescriptive manuals.⁵⁷

zum 65. Geburtstag, ed. Dorothee Lindemann, Berndt Volkmann, and Klaus-Peter Wegera. Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik, 618 (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1995), 71–94; U. Schulze, “Büchlein (‘zweites Büchlein’),” *Lexikon des Mittelalters*, vol. 2 (Stuttgart and Weimar: Metzler, 1999), 836–37; and Kurt Schreinert, “Büchlein,” *Reallexikon der deutschen Literaturgeschichte*, ed. Werner Kohlschmidt, Wolfgang Mohr, Paul Merker, and Wolfgang Stämmler, vol. 1 (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1956), 197–98.

⁵³ Rasmussen, “If Men Desire You,” 158.

⁵⁴ Ruys, “Introduction,” *What Nature*, 1–38; here 18.

⁵⁵ Krueger, “Introduction,” xxviii.

⁵⁶ See, for example, Kathleen Ashley and Robert L. Clark’s introduction to *Medieval Conduct*, especially x, xii–xvii.

⁵⁷ One just has to think of such fictional female characters as Queen Isolde in Gottfried von Strassburg’s *Tristan* or the eponymous protagonist of the heroic epic *Kudrun*. Numerous other historical and fictional female figures are discussed in Classen, *Power of a Woman’s Voice*, especially in the introduction and Chapter 1. On Queen Isolde, see Albrecht Classen, “Matriarchy versus Patriarchy: The Role of the Irish Queen Isolde in Gottfried von Strassburg’s *Tristan*,” *Neuphilologus*, 73.1 (1989): 77–89; Ann Marie Rasmussen, “‘In This She Takes after Me’: Queen Isolde and Princess Isolde in Gottfried von Strassburg’s *Tristan und Isolde*,” *Mothers and Daughters*, 113–35; and eadem, “The Female Figures in Gottfried’s *Tristan und Isolde*,” *A Companion to Gottfried von Strassburg’s “Tristan”*, ed. Will Hasty. Studies in German Literature, Linguistics, and Culture (Rochester, NY: Camden, and Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2002), 137–57; Ingrid Strasser, “*Isold, die Mutter, Isold, die Tochter, und Isold als blansche mains*. Überlegungen zu drei Frauenfiguren in Gottfrids ‘Tristan’ oder ‘Tristan gegen den Strich gelesen,’” *Il romanzo di Tristano nella letteratura del Medioevo. Der ‘Tristan’ in der Literatur des Mittelalters*, ed. Paola Schulze-Belli and

It may be more productive then, as Krueger suggests, to approach conduct literature as a reflection of an ideal, an example of what its authors "wished the life to be like."⁵⁸ And yet, the treatment of laughter in *Frauenbuch* and didactic discourse in general reveals that even this ideal was far from uncomplicated, since it arose out of a disputatious and complex medieval culture, in which lay and clerical discourses were far from separate, but rather debated and shaped each other⁵⁹; in which the necessity for laughter, eroticism, and procreation clashed with the suspicious view of women and the veneration of restraint and chastity; and in which competing norms and notions of femininity and masculinity coexisted and changed over time.⁶⁰

Written by a nobleman and a famous courtly poet rather than by a church-educated cleric, *Frauenbuch*, on the one hand, offers a defense of women and provides a powerful model for female behavior by featuring a strong and vocal protagonist, unafraid of voicing her opinions and capable of logical reasoning and mounting a strong defense of what she considers to be just and right. Yet on the other hand, it is precisely the guise of courtly exaltation of women that allows Ulrich von Liechtenstein to gradually and skillfully take control of his vociferous female dissident, revert to the model of femininity as silenced, accepting, and compliant, and thus send a starkly familiar message.⁶¹ His text is wonderfully

Michael Dallapiazza. *Collana di studi tergestini sul Medioevo* (Trieste: Associazione di cultura Medioevale, 1990), 67–78.

⁵⁸ Krueger, "Introduction," xxviii.

⁵⁹ Not surprisingly, the clerical view of female nature as something to be restrained can be detected even in the most worldly literary works such as Arthurian romances, since the court's administrative center (the office of the chancellor), equipped with lettered clerks, allowed for production not only of functional but also of literary texts and that most authors of secular epics were educated as clerics. See Frits Pieter Van Oostrom, *Court and Culture: Dutch Literature, 1350–1450* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 9. On the role of the clergy in courtly culture, see Bumke, *Courtly Culture*, 492; C. Stephen Jaeger's *The Origins of Courtliness—Civilizing Trends and the Formation of Courtly Ideals—939–1210*. The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), and id., *Ennobling Love: In Search of a Lost Sensibility*. The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999); Nicole M. Schulman, *Where Troubadours Were Bishops: The Occitania of Folc of Marseille (1150–1231)*. Medieval History and Culture, 7 (New York and London: Routledge, 2001).

⁶⁰ Cf. Ann Marie Rasmussen, "Reason and the Female Voice in Walther von der Vogelweide's Poetry," *Medieval Woman's Song: Cross-Cultural Approaches*, ed. Anne L. Klinck and Ann Marie Rasmussen. The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 168–86; here 169.

⁶¹ The view of courtly love and praise-of-women topos as forms of misogyny is not new, of course. See, for example, Alcuin Blamires, *The Case for Women in Medieval Culture* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 237 and 10, respectively "Many of the defense arguments could be interpreted as misogyny in disguise"; "'Honouring ladies' came to be a proverbial definition of male honor." Also see E. Jane Burns, "The Man Behind the Lady in Troubadour Lyric," *Romance Notes* 25.3 (1985): 254–70; and R. Howard Bloch, "Medieval Misogyny," *Representations* 20 (Fall 1987): 1–24 (Special Issue: *Misogyny, Misandry, and Misanthropy*).

duplicitous: it is a work that seems to chastise men, while actually educating women; a work in which women are given the power of voice and will as well as the courage to object to men, while being silenced by the reinstated gender order; a work that with the help of its rhetoric seems to elevate women, while in the end locking them up within the confines of the traditional patriarchal system.⁶² Although unique in its encapsulation of both sides of the debate on laughter and femininity, *Frauenbuch* shares with other conduct and didactic texts the ideal, according to which women are respected as long as they themselves are respectfully silent, and obeyed as long as they themselves are obedient.

⁶² In his survey of the defense-of-women tradition, Alcuin Blamires points out that “even in the most nearly feminist medieval writings, those most affirmative of female autonomy, there will lurk a shadow of patriarchy.” Blamires, *The Case for Women*, 5.

Chapter 6

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Pushing Decorum: Uneasy Laughter in Heinrich von dem Türlîn's *Diu Crône*

Zynische Witze haben eine demaskierende Funktion.
(Cynical jokes have an unmasking function.)
Hans Speier¹

Decorum is appropriate behavior, it is socially accepted and understood and carries with it expected behavior. In other words, decorum is a social contract that dictates propriety. For instance, if a woman attending an official banquet spills wine on herself, the other persons at the banquet would either offer assistance to help deal with the mishap or they would ignore her clumsiness as not to add to the woman's embarrassment. What the people assembled at the banquet would not do is verbally ridicule the woman and invite a collective laugh at her expense. Yet this is the situation at a midwinter festival at Arthur's court, only on a much larger scale. We, the readers, are witnesses to a significant transgression of decorum and we are invited to participate, to laugh along.² What accounts for such significant transgression of what Gerhild Scholz Williams calls "the high seriousness of medieval ideals" which is "a system of meaning" for medieval courtly society?³

¹ Hans Speier, *Witz und Politik: Essay über die Macht und das Lachen* (Zürich: Edition Interfrom, 1975), 19–20.

² For a cultural history of humor and laughter, see *A Cultural History of Humour*, ed. Jan Bremmer and Herman Roodenburg (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1997). See particularly chapters one through four.

³ Gerhild Scholz Williams, "License to Laugh: Making Fun of Chivalry in Some Medieval Texts" *Monatshefte* 78.1 (1986): 26–37; here 26. Scholz Williams analyzes late medieval German *Fastnachtspiele*, public plays by burghers which satyryze the less than ideal behavior of the nobility and are meant to elicit public laughter. She also shows that this public derision "distinguishes carefully between acceptable and unacceptable satyric modes . . ." and that "the legitimacy and power of

This paper investigates the narrative elements which make this communal transgression possible and looks at the function of the ridicule and resultant laughter.

Decorum and propriety are not monolithic; rather, they are situational and space specific. Space is twofold; it is physical space, and it is its identity assigned by humans, or "place."⁴ As a human construct place is imbued with its own reality created by symbolic meaning referenced in terms of humans and the human interactions occurring with it and in it. These interactions, although not always recognized as an artifice, are shaped by social contract: we do not yell in a library, we do not laugh in a funeral parlor, and we adhere to procedural decorum in official meetings, such as parliamentary sessions or town hall meetings. In this sense a library as a place is defined not only by the fact that its physical space contains books, but by the human actions occurring within it. If, as Michel de Certeau states, "a place is an instantaneous configuration of positions,"⁵ and these positions include interpersonal relationships, the possibility of them, and the realization of them, then space has an implicit liminal aspect. While physical space remains constant the symbolic identity of place can be instantaneously reconfigured. The possibility of different spaces, which includes interpersonal relationships is liminal, because here social norms can be stretched to address social needs that the reality of the original space renders unapproachable. Therefore the possible reconfiguration carries with it a change in the behavior considered socially acceptable. Such a reassignment of the symbolic identity of a place occurs at the midwinter festival at Arthur's court. The banquet hall is initially a place of official celebration, where the members of the Arthurian society, the embodiment of the ideal courtly society, come together for a Christmas festival. Yet the identity of place assigned to the hall is reconfigured from one of

the ruling aristocrats . . . remain on the whole untouched" (26).

⁴ The fifteen definitions of the noun *place* in the *Encarta World English Dictionary* (Bloomsbury Publishing, Microsoft Corporation, 1999). This can be roughly subdivided into cultural place and interpersonal place: 1. an area, position, or portion of space that somebody or something can be in; 2. a particular geographical locality such as a town, country, or region; 3. a relatively open area in a town, for example, a public square or a short street; 4. the house or other type of accommodation where somebody lives; 5. a building or area where something in particular happens or is located; 6. a particular point in something, for example, a book, film, or story; 7. the position or location where somebody or something belongs; 9. somebody's social position or rank in an organization; 10. somebody's responsibility or right, especially one arising from who the person is or the status he or she has; 11. a job or position; 12. somewhere for somebody to sit, for example, at a table during a meal or in the audience of a theater; 13. the position of somebody or something in a rank, sequence, or series.

⁵ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (1984; Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988), 1.

celebration to a place where the human failings and shortcomings of the court members can be and are disclosed and dealt with.

Mikhail Bakhtin⁶ describes carnival as establishing a temporal and liminal space in which normal social structures and concomitant interpersonal power relationships are placed out of order; they are suspended. This temporary shift away from normal societal order can allow for the safe multidirectional expression of social criticism. In addition, in such a parallel and truncated reality the safe dissipation of accumulated, unexpressed social ill will becomes possible, which in turn can result in behavior more in line with a given social contract. In other words, the creation of a temporary symbolic space can paradoxically allow for sanctioned safe transgression of social norms. During carnival social criticism and stress release are accomplished through humor and laughter. The quality of this particular humor is by design brash, loud, blunt, and often obscene. It is meant to reveal and push the envelope and to trigger communal laughter. This is derisive, not gracious laughter.

In one late Middle High German courtly romance, *Diu Crône*,⁷ such carnivalesque space is created in its two trial scenes, the Trial of the Tankard and the Trial of the Glove. Elements in these scenes can be described as carnivalesque: (1) a festivity celebrated in isolation; (2) initial unusual mood of the court members; (3) extraordinary characters bearing magical objects; (4) a bawdy mood charged with blunt language and filled with gratuitously explicit sexual language; (5) and communal laughter elicited by the situation.

⁶ Mikhail Bakhtin, Pam Morris, Valentin Voloshinov, and Pavel Medvedev, *Bakhtin Reader: Selected Writings of Bakhtin, Medvedev, Voloshinov*, ed. Pam Morris (London: E. Arnold, 1994), 194–244. For a solid critique of Bakhtin's thesis, see Mark Burde's contribution to this volume.

⁷ *Diu Crône von Heinrich von dem Türlîn*, ed. Gottlob Heinrich Friedrich Scholl, Bibliothek des Literarischen Vereins in Stuttgart, 27 (Stuttgart: Literarischer Verein, 1852). Even though Scholl's edition mirrors the difficult manuscript situation it represents a solid and still trustworthy complete Middle High German edition, so citations are taken from this compilation. Translations into English are my own. For manuscript descriptions and provenance, see the foreword by Fritz Peter Knapp and Manuela Niesner, ed. *Heinrich von dem Türlîn, Die Krone (Verse 1–12281). Nach der Handschrift 2779 der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek nach Vorarbeiten von Alfred Ebenbauer, Klaus Zatloukal und Horst P. Pütz*, Altdutsche Textbibliothek, 112 (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2000), ix–xii. For facsimile reproductions and manuscript comparisons, see Klaus Zatloukal, *Heinrich von dem Türlîn: Diu Krone. Ausgewählte Abbildungen zur gesamten handschriftlichen Überlieferung*. Litterae, 95 (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1982). For a comprehensive overview of research on later Middle High German Arthurian romances, see Markus Wennerhold, *Späte mittelhochdeutsche Artusromane: "Lanzelet", "Wigalois", "Daniel von dem Blühenden Tal", "Diu Crône": Bilanz der Forschung 1960–2000*, Würzburger Beiträge zur deutschen Philologie, 27 (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 2005).

Let us examine these points in more detail. (1) The settings for the court gatherings in this Arthurian narrative are the castles Tintaguel and Karidol. The author describes the isolation of the castles in terms of geography, situated on the peninsula of Cornwall. For the first trial the weather adds to the isolation; the countryside is a cold and frozen winter landscape (vv. 466–69). Arthur has called the court together to celebrate Christmas, an unusual time for an Arthurian gathering customarily called in spring time. (2) In accord with courtly expectations Arthur has made preparations for a splendid festival en par with his renown; with the help of family members he readies the castle and procures extraordinarily precious gifts to lavish on his guests and the members of the court. These gifts include rare horses, precious weapons, rich cloth and clothes which the author describes in expected great detail (vv. 470–519). And still, despite Arthur's exemplary efforts the court members become bored and listless, yearning for something to happen (vv. 925–33). (3) Only the unexpected appearance of an extraordinary creature⁸ reanimates the court society. This messenger of the sea king Priure requests that all court members engage in a trial of virtue. This ultimately leads to the needed social commentary.

The isolation of the physical space of the castle, the sense of suspension of winter, and the setting aside of normalcy caused by the visitor turn the hall of Tintaguel into a safe setting which allows for exploration of the courtly ideals of *minne* and *triuwe*. In this setting the actual sexual behavior of court members, particularly of the women, is exposed and made public and it becomes clear that their behavior is in stark contrast to the ideals of courtly love. Announcement of this behavior is couched in lewd jokes; the resultant laughter communicates understanding, creates group cohesion, and functions as a safety valve; it relieves tensions and reinforces gender stereotypes, but it also allows for the awareness of actual behavior contradictory to such stereotypes. Such whole sale critique of the Arthurian society is quite unexpected and cannot be explained with the overall ironic tone of this romance alone. For these reasons we need to look at the hero and at the structure of this narrative.

⁸ A detailed description of this fantastically shaped child sized fish man with a clear sweet voice is provided in vv. 933–1002.

*Diu Crône*⁹ has never been counted among the classical Middle High German courtly romances but is categorized as a post-classical text, and rightly so.¹⁰ This is due as much to the sheer abundance of material and its treatment as to its diffuse narrative focus. *Diu Crône* was written between 1220 and 1240 in the area of Styria, Austria, at a time when the Arthurian tradition had been firmly established in the German vernacular. This time frame places it at the very end of the 'classical' period of German courtly literature. And indeed, *Diu Crône* leaves no doubt that its author was not only familiar with the German Arthurian tradition but also had detailed knowledge of much of the preceding European

⁹ *Diu Crône* is 30,000 lines long; it is composed in rhymed couplets, predominantly in iambic tetrameter. Rhymed triplet end-groups are used to identify the end of sections, which vary in length from twenty to sixty lines. The text exists in its entirety in only one single manuscript from the late fifteenth century, and corruption in transmission is evident (Thomas xii). The first 12,000 lines also exist in an early fourteenth-century manuscript, as do five more fragments. The first modern edition was compiled by Scholl in 1856; the complete first translation into a modern language is the English translation by J. W. Thomas 1989.

¹⁰ Until recently much research has been focused on uncovering the identity of the historical figure Heinrich von dem Türlîn rather than engage in textual analysis. Because of the great richness of material the story has been deemed an "interpretative challenge," so Hartmut Bleumer, *Die Crône Heinrichs von dem Türlîn: Formerfahrung und Konzeption eines späten Artusromans*. Münchener Texte und Untersuchungen zur deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters, 112 (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1997). Recent scholarly effort has shifted to determine the structural, content, and qualitative transformations within this romance; see Albrecht Classen, "The Literary Puzzle of Heinrich von dem Türlîn's 'Diu Crône' Seen From a Postmodern Perspective," *Michigan Germanic Studies* XXIV.2 (1998): 111–28; Christopher Cormeau, 'Wigalois' und 'Diu Crône': Zwei Kapitel zur Gattungsgeschichte des nachklassischen Aventiureroman, *Münchener Texte und Untersuchungen zur deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters*, 57 (Munich: Artemis, 1977); Andreas Daiber, *Bekannte Helden in neuen Gewändern?: Intertextuelles Erzählen im "Biterolf und Dietleib" sowie am Beispiel Keies und Gaweins im "Lanzelet", "Wigalois" und der "Crone"*. Mikrokosmos, 53 (Frankfurt a. M.: Peter Lang, 1999); Ernst Dick, "Traditions and Emancipation: The Generic Aspect of Heinrich's 'Crône'," *Genres in Medieval German Literature*, ed. Hubert Heinen and Ingeborg Henderson. Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik, 439 (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1986), 74–92; Lewis Jillings, *Diu Crone of Heinrich Von Dem Türlein: The Attempted Emancipation of Secular Narrative*. Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik, 258 (Göppingen: Kümmerle Verlag, 1980); Werner Schröder, "Zur Literaturverarbeitung durch Heinrich von dem Türlîn in einem Gawein-Roman 'Diu Crône'," *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur* 121.2 (1992): 131–74; Peter Stein, *Integration, Variation, Destruktion: Die 'Crône' Heinrichs von dem Türlîn innerhalb der Gattungsgeschichte des deutschen Artusromans*. Deutsche Literatur von den Anfängen bis 1700, 32 (Bern and New York: Peter Lang, 2000); Neil Thomas, *A German View of Camelot: Wirnt von Grafenberg's 'Wigalois' and Arthurian Tradition*. Europäische Hochschulschriften, Reihe I, Deutsche Sprache und Literatur, 963 (Bern and New York: Peter Lang, 1987); Annegret Wagner-Harken, *Märchelemente und ihre Funktion in der 'Crône' Heinrichs von dem Türlîn: ein Beitrag zur Unterscheidung zwischen "klassischer" und "nachklassischer" Artusepik*. Deutsche Literatur von den Anfängen bis 1700, 21 (Bern and New York: Peter Lang, 1995); Christine Zach, *Die Erzählmotive der 'Crône' Heinrichs von dem Türlîn und ihre altfranzösischen Quellen: ein kommentiertes Register*. Passauer Schriften zu Sprache und Literatur, 5 (Passau: Wissenschaftsverlag R. Rothe, 1990).

Arthurian literature and classical tradition. Heinrich himself named his romance *Diu Crône* intending it to be the crowning achievement of a whole extensive textual tradition. Heinrich did indeed incorporate a great wealth of motifs and a large number of Arthurian *dramatis personae* and he repeated and recombined these elements seemingly endlessly, quite in line with a post-classical classification.

Yet unlike other post-classical authors Heinrich also “was quite original in adapting the material to his own purposes,” as Thomas notes.¹¹ Heinrich’s adaptations include abundant richness of variations on thematic stock, here found in the many adventures of Gawein and other members of the court. There are also unusual motifs: an active Arthur, festivities in the dead of winter, a fairy knight, the abduction and near rape of the queen, a married Gawein, and Goddesses who safe-guard both protagonists. And other new material include the *Abenteuerketten*, chains of adventures, and their magical, fantastic, and even apocalyptic elements. But there is also the startling use of sarcasm throughout the narrative; the author’s sarcasm is particularly biting when he deals with normed gender behavior and gender relations, as he himself points out. The most poignant examples are found in the two trial scenes¹² when the court members’ purity of thought and their faithfulness are judged. Thomas describes Heinrich’s language as marked by “Exaggeration and lack of moderation . . . the clever humour of Chrestien and his German pupils becomes boisterous comedy, particularly in the trial scenes” (xi–xii). These episodes truly are on some level “boisterous comedy,” but the extended misogynist humor and the nuanced descriptions of the resultant laughter are the most striking features of these trial scenes.

Keeping in mind the inherent didactic function of medieval literature the question arises as to the intended instructive purpose of this particular romance. A related question that needs to be asked pertains to the special structure in which exemplum and admonishment are presented. This requires a closer look at the role of the hero and his transgression so central to Middle High German and other European romances and the assumed reflection of real issues in contemporary court society. To place this into its literary tradition Hartmann von Aue’s *Erec* and *Iwein* will serve as examples. Both heroes apply themselves excessively to one single aspect of expected knightly behavior, which causes neglect of other parts of their lives.¹³ Erec’s transgression is “verligen” (to stay in bed too long). Because of

¹¹ *The Crown: A Tale of Sir Gawein and King Arthur’s Court*, trans. John Wesley Thomas (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), xiii–xxiii.

¹² Trial by tankard: vv. 918–2458, and trial by glove: vv. 22973–4692.

¹³ For a detailed discussion of the idea of balance and its centrality in the courtly behavioral code, see Silvia Ranawake, “‘verligen’ und ‘versitzen’: Das Versäumnis des Helden und die Sünde der

his obsessive exclusive attention to his wife he neglects the other duties which he as knight and as ruler has to fulfill in the public sphere. In contrast, Iwein's transgression is "versitzen" (to remain too long in the saddle), an action which also results in neglect; this time the protagonist is so fixated on combat and jousting that he ignores his wife and also his obligations as ruler. These premised behavioral weaknesses, the subsequent personal crisis, and ensuing development toward the knightly ideal then supply the structure of the romance.

Gawein

With Gawein as its hero, *Diu Crône* is unique among Middle High German Arthurian romances.¹⁴ To make Gawein the protagonist inevitably results in a change in the usual plot development, a departure from the narrative elements and ultimately the structure of previous Middle High German Arthurian romances. These exhibit the genre-defining bipartite structure, shaped by the hero's loss of his place in court society and his subsequent reintegration. The point of the classical Arthurian romance is to narrate the personal development of one hero knight within the parameters of conduct set forth in courtly society; this of course while delighting the audience with lavish descriptions of opulent material things and valiant jousts and battles. The task of the hero is to find a healthy balance between his individual needs and the knightly virtues which he must exemplify, foremost the primary overreaching virtue of *maze*, balance, as exemplified by Erec and Iwein.¹⁵

The generic story sequence chronicles the hero's journey to such balance. First, the hero seemingly attains his personal goal and gains initial acceptance as a member of the Arthurian society. He then violates the knightly code, signalling that he has not yet internalized this code and this transgression leads the hero to be expelled from court. He then undergoes a process of learning and personal redemption, which is outwardly visible in the adventures, during which he must face his personal weakness. Once the hero has shown that he has understood and accepted the true meaning of the knightly code, he achieves reintegration into courtly society. These are the fundamental elements of the classical Arthurian

Trägheit in den Artusromanen Hartmanns von Aue," *Chrétien De Troyes and the German Middle Ages: Papers from an International Symposium*, ed. Martin H. Jones and R. A. Wisbey, *Arthurian Studies*, 26 (Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK: D.S. Brewer, 1993), 19–35.

¹⁴ Arthur is a second active protagonist, again highly unusual.

¹⁵ See Otfrid Ehrismann and Albrecht Classen, et al, *Ehre und Mut, Aventiure und Minne. Höfische Wortgeschichten aus dem Mittelalter* (Munich: Beck, 1995) for thorough discussions of the major aspects of courtly culture and its programmatic virtues.

story of the German tradition. Mertens¹⁶ states that the motivation behind such a developmental narrative lies in Chrétien de Troyes' concept, "eine Problematik der höfischen Gesellschaft darzustellen und dem Hörer erfahrbar zu machen" (294–95; to present a problem of courtly society and to allow the listener a tangible personal experience of this problem).

The narration of the social stress of one single hero's behaviour at odds with the behavioral code of society results in the expected generic bipartite structure, arguably present in all classical Middle High German Arthurian romances before *Diu Crône*. And it is the narration of the hero's turmoil and process of redemption, which, in turn, allows the audience to be entertained as well as admonished. *Dulce et utile*. However, in *Diu Crône* the hero is Gawein and in all traditions this one knight is already the perfected knight. Gawein is often used as a foil to the particular knight in need of perfection, but he is not that knight. Herein lies the dilemma. The hero of our text is already perfect and there is no need, and indeed no opportunity, to highlight an ethical problem and to narrate an internal struggle and thus no expected reason for the chains of adventure. With a traditional framework *Diu Crône* could not be the vehicle to highlight and discuss the above quoted "faults of courtly society," be it *verligen* or *verrittern* or something else. For this to be possible a conceptual shift is necessary.

Here I argue that Heinrich's innovations extend into creating different mechanisms which allowed him to address a noteworthy fault of courtly society. The transgressions featured in *Diu Crône* are not the moral challenge of one knight whose struggle represents a general moral ill; here the entire court society is accused. Deceitfulness and inconsistency of heart, that is to say, impure thoughts and deeds, are profiled and commented on. In *Diu Crône* the thematic transgression is the moral short-coming of all members of the Arthurian court the extent of which is brought to light in the two trial scenes.

The Trial Scenes

The Trial of the Tankard is 1540 lines long, extending from verses 918 to 2455; the Trial of the Glove is 1730 lines long, extending from verses 22973 to 24692. Their length alone makes these scenes significant; together they comprise over 10 percent of a text of 30 000 lines. Their positions within the text, near the beginning

¹⁶ Volker Mertens, "Artus," *Epische Stoffe des Mittelalters*, ed. Volker Mertens and Ulrich Müller. Kröners Taschenbuchausgabe, 483 (Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner, 1984), 290–340.

and near the end, create a structural bracket. This suggests that these scenes should be considered a major element when analyzing the whole narrative. Each scene is structured in the same way: an outsider comes before the gathered Arthurian court, bearing a magical object whose powers make visible the extent of each court member's failing, a perfect opportunity for Keïi's sarcastic jokes to reveal intimate details of each court member's moral improprieties.

The Trial of the Tankard

It is Christmas time at Tintagel and the Arthurian court has come together to celebrate. The court is assembled in the great hall and all are waiting for something to happen. A listlessness overcomes the gathering, so much so that they are unable to continue to exhibit the courtly characteristic of *vröude*,¹⁷ joy. At that moment a stranger arrives at court; he is the messenger of the sea king Priure. The messenger is brought before King Arthur and proposes an exchange: he offers a fantastic magical object, a tankard, made from a human skull imbued with a truth spell. To obtain this precious object all members of the court must participate in a trial of virtue. If one member of the court could be found to be above reproach and pass the test the tankard would remain with Arthur and add to the court's renown. The knights are intrigued by this offer, they discuss it, and finally agree that the trial should be attempted. Arthur invites the messenger to stay and agrees that all members of the court will participate in the proposed trial. After Arthur has accepted the challenge it is revealed that the female members of the court have not been present during the deliberations. Only now are the women of the court invited to join the men in the great hall. It is a foregone conclusion that all women will fail the trial; the narrator knows the outcome and tells his audience even before the trial begins:

Und wurden dâ in den sal
Die vrouwen alle geladen

¹⁷ Arno Menzel-Reuters, *Vröude: Artusbild, Fortuna- und Gralkonzeption in der Crône des Heinrich von dem Türlin als Verteidigung des höfischen Lebensideals*. Europäische Hochschulschriften, Reihe I: Deutsche Sprache und Literature, 1134 (Frankfurt a. M.: Peter Lang, 1989), considers *vröude* to be the overarching structural and narrative theme of *Diu Crône*. See also Siegfried Christoph, "The Language and Culture of Joy," *Words of Love and Love of Words in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, ed. Albrecht Classen. Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 347 (Tempe, Arizona: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2008), 319–34.

Ûf ir wîplîche schaden,
Dâ die herren gesâzen.

(vv. 1202–05)

[And to their detriment all the ladies were invited to come to the hall where the lords sat.]

The tankard reveals transgressions against the courtly ideal of *triuwe*; it exposes a false heart. Only a person with a true heart is able to drink from this vessel without spilling its content. The more wine is spilled the larger the transgression. The definition for what constitutes a false heart differs for men and women. For a man this signifies that he is evil, mean-spirited, and deceiving his sweetheart: “no italicsswie er gemeiletez herze treit / Oder ob er mit valsche pflleit / Sîner âmien minne (1136–38; if he has a mean spirited heart or if he is untrue toward his love) ; for a woman it merely indicates deceitfulness: *ob sie valsches herzen pfligt* (whether she is deceitful) (v. 1146).

Once the women have joined the men in the great hall the judging begins. The queen of Lanphuht is the first member of all the court to be given the tankard and the first to fail the trial spectacularly. Heinrich describes how she spills the wine:

Der wart dô der kopf gegeben,
Daz sie trünke dar ûz,
Sie enwiste nicht umbe den grûs,
Was er an wîben zeigt.
Do sie den kopf geneiget,
Diu vrouwe sich sô sêre begôz,
Daz ein runs bî ir vlôz
Starke breit unde grôz.

(vv. 1222–29)

[The lady was given the skull to drink from and she knew nothing about the horror and what it revealed in women. As she tipped the skull she spilled so much that it streamed down broad and deep].

This misfortune is utterly unexplainable from Queen Lanphuht's perspective and upsets her greatly, causing her to feel shame: *welher geschicht sie sich schamt* (she was ashamed because of this incident) (v. 1230). All women present comprehend the social faux pas and feel collective shame for Lanphuht. This shame is based not so much on the fact that Lanphuht spilled wine over herself but the fact that the entire court witnessed it:

Und die vrouwen allesamt,
Wan sie sêre bewac
Dirre ungelückes krac,
Der ir was geschehen,
Daz ez der hof het gesehen,
Und wurden allesament rôz.

(vv. 1231–36)

[And all women felt very burdened by this incident that had happened to her and that the whole court had witnessed it. And they all blushed.]

In a lengthy address Keiî admonishes Queen Ginover, next to be given the tankard, to hold on tighter than Queen Lanphuht had done, lest she, too, should pour wine over herself:

Er sprach: Von zin oder von bli
 Wære ein zentenære
 Vil kûme alsô swære,
 Als dirre leide kopf ist;
 Sîn muoz ein rîse haben frist
 Ob er erheben wolde
 Dise masse von golde
 Mit steine sô gewæhet
 Und der mit stæten væhet
 Clâretes einen âmen:
 Wie solte des gerâmen
 Ein vrowe, sîn würde begozzen?
 Wær sie stârker ein teil.

(vv. 1241–54)

[He said: A ton of zinc and lead would hardly be as heavy as this bothersome skull. A giant would be hard pressed to lift this mass of gold and jewels and filled with a barrel of wine. How could a woman lift this without pouring wine all over herself. She would have to be a bit stronger.]

Keiî's sarcasm plays on the concrete and symbolic meanings of impurity and the lack of the women's fortitude. Yet when Queen Ginover fails the trial Keiî reverses his reasoning and he offers as explanation that she is too strong: *ir sît grimme armstarc* (you have a very strong arm) (v. 1292). The author identifies Keiî as an habitually sarcastic person: *nu was Keiî und sîn spot / nâch alter gewonheit dâ bî* (now Keiî was there with his sarcasm as he was wont to be) (vv. 1239–40). Keiî delights in the situation; he knows full well that the physical weight of the tankard has nothing to do with the ladies' difficulties and he knows that the other men also know.

The situation escalates. One by one the ladies fail the trial and anxiously wonder why. As the tankard is passed from woman to woman Keiî's running commentary becomes increasingly bawdy, exposing intimate details of personal relationships and thus revealing the reason for the women's inability to drink simply from the tankard. A total of thirty four women are named as having failed, but this is not the full extent of failure at King Arthur's court: the narrator informs the reader that because so many more failed he could not name them all.

Keiî berates every woman who is given the tankard and no one, that is no man, objects verbally to the commentary. The reaction moves from tacit approval to moderate overt approval as exemplified by the exchange between Arthur and Gawein: *Artûs unde Gâwein / die lachten under in zwein / von dirre ungeschichte* (Arthur and Gawein laughed to each other about this misfortune) (vv. 1318–19). The joke is shared by the men but approval becomes clear to all when loud bursts of laughter are heard ringing through the hall. This is inconceivable behavior according to the rules of courtly conduct,¹⁸ but the men's behavior does lie within the bounds of this new liminal space, and the extension of the decorum that defines it. As the place has changed so have the rules of conduct. Not until the social need and purpose for the carnivalesque have been satisfied, do Arthur and others declare that Keiî has gone too far.

The Trial of the Glove

The Trial of the Glove has a similar narrative structure as the Trial of the Tankard: Arthur assembles the court for a celebration, this time for a wedding; the usual festive mood is charged with a strangeness, this time an anxiety over Gawein's safety; an agent from outside the court appears and brings a magical object, a glove, to test the court members, this time for inconstancy of the heart and past shame; all court members have to participate and again all but Arthur and Gawein fail. The main difference is that the women of the court know from the start that this is a trial of morality. The magical glove is worn on the right hand and if a person is constant and shameless, the right side of the body will no longer be visible. But if the wearer was unfaithful and transgressed the dictates of *minne* the body parts involved in the inconstancy or shamefulness will remain visible. And once again Keiî is allowed free reign with his sarcastic comment, but his remarks have a different quality; they reflect the changed parameters and are marked by increased bawdiness focusing on the inevitably exposed body parts.

We, the reader are not simply told about the various body parts exposed by the magic of the glove, a passive task; we are invited to participate in creating the joke. If Keiî's use of euphemistic language and double entendre to describe sexual behavior and the occasional body part was not enough to draw the reader in, the narrator addressing the reader directly forces him to participate actively in the communal laughter:

¹⁸ For another discussion of the rules of courtly conduct, see the contribution by Olga V. Trokhimenko in this volume. Further research literature can be found there.

Der verswant der lîp halber sâ
 An dem rehten teile:
 Niuwan von unheile
 Beleip ir des lîbes
 Ze sehene, dâ man wîbes
 Niht offenliche ze sehen gert,
 Und dâ muoz mite gewert
 Sîn, daz man loben sol.
 Was ich mein, daz wîzt ir wol,
 Wan sie ist der reht schol. (vv. 23972–81)

[Almost the entire half of her [Flursensephin's] body disappeared, only the part of women which one does not wish to see in public was visible, although it is a praiseworthy part. What I mean you surely know, because she is the source of life.]

In deciphering the allusions and the word play the reader creates the meaning of the jokes and is paralleling the process of understanding the court members are undergoing. By participating the reader becomes part of the courtly society; he can laugh along with the jokes and can also experiences the didactic immediacy the text was designed to create.

The court is laughing and we are laughing with them. Bergson supports my thesis and Bakhtin's idea of carnival: "Laughter, as a collective activity, has a social and moral role, it forces people to eliminate their vices. It is a factor of uniformity of behaviours, it condemns ludicrous and eccentric behaviours."¹⁹ At this point in the trial scene laughter becomes the medium for social criticisms as well as the vehicle allowing for their safe multidirectional expression. Tensions that might otherwise arise as a result of being chastised are relaxed in this unusual and extraordinary atmosphere. In Hobbes' own words: "Sudden glory, is the passion which maketh those Grimaces called Laughter; and is caused by some sudden act of their own, that pleaseth them; or by the apprehension of some deformed thing in another, by comparison whereof they suddenly applaud themselves."²⁰ The corrective function of laughter and its release of energy that would otherwise fuel unstated ill will or the shame of having personal transgressions brought to light fulfils the purpose of carnival as well as the didactic purposes of the text.

As the trial scenes go on the tone of laughter changes as the limits of this temporal space of carnival are reached. Keiî's barrage of risqué joking continues until it becomes excessive. He breaches the limits of the extended behavioral code

¹⁹ Henri Bergson, *Laughter: an Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*, trans. Cloudesley Brereton, Henry Shovell and Fred Rothwell, <http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/4352> (last accessed on January 30, 2010).

²⁰ Quoted by R. E. Ewin, "Hobbes on Laughter," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 51.202 (2001): 29–40.

of carnival when his commentary moves beyond the point of moral educational or humorous anecdotes able to relieve tension of seriousness:

Von dirre rede wart michel schal
 Gemeineliche in dem sal.
 Des verdrôz die vrouwen sêre;
 Och heten die unêre
 Die ritter gerne gedaht. (vv. 24049–54)

[Everyone in the hall was laughing at this speech. This upset the women and the men would have gladly ignored the insult.]

In pushing beyond the limits of what is acceptable behavior in carnival the space collapses. Suspension of reality can be sustained for a time only before participants return to the dominant reality. Consisting of liminal, temporal, and co-created space, carnival cannot continue to exist once the community that created it and agreed to its concomitant reality no longer emotionally occupies that space: *Vil maneger dô erlachtet, / Dem es doch niht ze muote was* (And many laughed at that even though they did not feel like laughing) (vv. 23720–21). Just as in the previous trial, it is when the limit of the carnivalesque is breached that the court is called back to reality. And so are we, the reader.

Conclusion

The usual hero of a courtly romance has to leave the court to confront his moral short-comings alone in space outside the court; he physically leaves the place of court and he can only return to take place, when he has become a more perfected member. In *Diu Crône* the entire court is morally compromised and needs to confront its shortcomings. Because it is not possible for this community *in toto* to step away from itself, to evaluate itself by normal rules of conduct, an alternative carnivalesque space beyond these limits is created. In this concomitant space social structures, interpersonal relationships, and limits of decorum are upset, which is understood by those involved in this alternative construct allowing for the displaced society to take inventory of its moral stock, a tense and difficult act under the best of circumstances. In this liminal space the normal rules of social conduct are changed. The limits of what can be said and done as well as what can be seen is altered. Perhaps paradoxically, in this symbolic space we transgress certain social rules in order to understand them better.

An integral part of carnival is laughter at the exposed transgressions of the moral code. Not only does laughter diffuse the tension created by the transgressions, it constitutes acknowledgment. Laughter is a barometer of the carnivalesque space: a healthy reaction to learning and growth when the space

serves its function safely to express social criticism, or it becomes an uneasy sound when the limits of social decorum, already expanded to allow for exploration, are pushed too far and criticism turns into harm. Once the portrayal of the social transgressions has become too severe, the carnivalesque collapses and we return to our everyday space and its expectation of ideal behavior to which our transgressions in the carnivalesque have helped us adjust.

Chapter 7

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Laughter and the Comedic in a Religious Text: The Example of the *Cantigas de Santa Maria*

Alfonso X King of Castile and Leon was born in Toledo in 1221 and died in Seville in 1284. He earned his sobriquet, El Sabio (the Wise or the Learned) because of the phenomenal literary production of his court. Alfonso and his team of scribes and translators compiled books on many, if not all, facets of the wisdom of his age. The king directly participated in or promoted the production of scientific treatises (many of which were translations of texts written in Arabic), legal treatises, and histories, books on recreation, didactic works, and religious and profane poetry. With the exception of Alfonso's poetry, which was composed in Galician-Portuguese, all of the other works attributed to him and his collaborators were written in Castilian, thus transforming this emerging romance tongue into the official language of his kingdoms and establishing its importance as a medium for translation of Latin, Arabic, and Hebrew texts.

Among his many ongoing literary projects, Alfonso gathered and set down in verse, together with musical annotation, 420 songs which recounted miracles performed by the Virgin Mary and songs in praise of the Queen of Heaven. This collection of songs, the *Cantigas de Santa Maria* (hereafter, CSM), was compiled between the years 1257 and 1283 and is extant in four thirteenth-century manuscripts. Two of these manuscripts are lavishly illustrated with every individual miracle tale or song of praise illustrated by one or two pages of six miniatures each. The miniatures illustrate key points in the song and the majority include a caption explaining the scene. Many of the stories are quite serious, recounting how both believers and non-believers find themselves in the direst of circumstances and call on Holy Mary for deliverance. Not surprisingly, the ever-merciful Virgin saves the petitioners who, in turn, proclaim the miraculous

occurrence far and wide. However, within this serious religious text, we also find tales that are humorous as well as characters who we would consider comedic. I will divide my discussion of humor in the CSM into theoretical considerations of humor in holy texts, the inclusion of comedic situations and characters, and direct expressions of laughter in the poetic texts.

While we, as contemporary readers, are circumspect about mixing the sacred and the profane, medieval authors and their audiences did not perceive these categories as mutually exclusive. Medieval people were both attuned to the intervention of the divine in everyday human affairs and they also recognized the physical and spiritual benefits of recreation and amusement. They embraced the sacred as inherent in everyday existence and pursued in literature the dual aims of moral benefit and pleasure.¹ Glending Olson, in his book *Literature as Recreation in the later Middle Ages*, cites a number of classical authors who helped to define the role of amusement in literature and Alfonso's court would certainly have been aware of such basic principals as Horace's ideas on the moral and recreational benefits of poetry as outlined in the *Ars poetica*.² Horace praised the poet who could, at the same time, both instruct and amuse his audience: "He has won every vote who has blended profit and pleasure, at once delighting and instructing the reader" ("Omne tulit punctum qui miscuit utile dulci, lectorem delectando partierque moenendo").³

Given Alfonso's training in the classic idea of *utile dulci*, he designed his Marian collection to promote devotion to the Virgin, i.e., instruct his audience, as well as entertain those who would listen to his songs. Hearing about the Virgin's miraculous deeds formed part of the experience of "Christian joy," and this pleasurable experience had edifying effects for its listeners beyond merely learning about Mary's miracles. Pleasure, as an end unto itself, was justified in the Middle Ages on both medical and psychological grounds. Olson observes "Taking pleasure in [literature] . . . is a response that, in the proper circumstances, contributes to physical or mental well-being and hence to one's capacity for activities more directly related to one's final end".⁴ Here one's final end is, of course, one's eternal salvation, obtained through faith and leading a life in

¹ Otis Green asserts that "It would be an error to imagine that there existed a barrier between the religious and the profane lyric. Often it was the same man who composed light-hearted poems for the mere joy of it and who at other moments celebrated the glory of the Mother of God". *Spain and the Western Tradition: The Castilian Mind in Literature from El Cid to Calderón*, 4 vols. (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1968), 1:29.

² Olson comments on Augustine's definition of *fibula* as a lie composed for profit and delight. He also cites Isidore of Seville who identifies one type of *fabula* whose purpose is delight. Glending Olson, *Literature as Recreation in the Later Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press 1982), 20-27.

³ Olson, *Literature as Recreation*, 20-21.

⁴ Olson, *Literature as Recreation*, 38.

accordance with Christian principles. King Alfonso in the prologue to the CSM openly states that concern for his own salvation was one of his motives for composing the collection.⁵ The idea that these songs also be pleasurable is inextricably linked to that of guarding one's physical and spiritual well-being on a path that will lead to the ultimate reward of eternal salvation.

Pleasure was thus an acceptable goal for the experience of literature, even for sacred texts, and laughter, the comic, and humor in moderation, were considered beneficial to man's soul. Conrad Hyers in his essay, "The Dialectic of the Sacred and the Comic," sees humor as the great moderator for tensions that arise in our perceptions of the sacred and our experiences of the comedic profane⁶. He observes that "The awesomeness and mystery of the holy, along with the anxiety it engenders, is temporarily suspended and relieved"⁷ when we laugh at what we generally consider sacrosanct. Hyers also claims that Freud's analysis of humor as an aggressive and rebellious strike against authority is applicable to the relationship of the comic to the sacred: "in humor the unquestioned authority of the sacred is questioned, the superior status of the holy is bracketed, and the radical distance between the sacred and the profane is minimized. The devotee who ordinarily assumes a posture of lowly prostration before that which is holy, now in laughter asserts himself and narrows the impassable gulf presupposed by the sacred".⁸ Robert Detweiler also speaks about humor in relationship to the sacred in terms of meeting a distinct social-religious need in Christianity. He identifies this imperative as "the need to relax occasionally from the repressiveness of a moral system without denying or actually abandoning that system."⁹ If we remember Alfonso's expressed desire to gain his salvation partly through the

⁵ Onde lle rogo, se ela quiser,
que lle praza do que dela disser
en meus cantares e, se ll'aprouguer,
que me dé gualardon com' ela dá
aos que ama . . . (I, 56).

[Therefore I pray, if it be Her will, that what I shall say of Her in my songs be pleasing to Her, and if it please Her, that She give me the reward which She gives to those She loves.]

All references to the CSM are from Walter Mettmann's three volume edition, *Alfonso X, el Sabio. Cantigas de Santa María*, Clásicos Castalia 134, 172, and 178 (Madrid: Castalia, 1986–1989). Volume is indicated in Roman numeral followed by page number(s).

All translations (unless otherwise indicated) are from Kathleen Kulp-Hill, *Songs of Holy Mary of Alfonso X, the Wise: A Translation of the Cantigas de Santa Maria* (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2000). All references to this work are to page number(s).

⁶ M. Conrad Hyers, "The Dialectic of the Sacred and the Comic," in *Holy Laughter: Essays on Religion in the Comic Perspective*, ed. M. Conrad Hyers (New York: The Seabury Press, 1969), 213–14.

⁷ Hyers, "The Dialectic," 219.

⁸ Hyers, "The Dialectic," 220.

⁹ Robert Detweiler, "The Jesus Jokes: Religious Humor in the Age of Excess," *Cross Currents* 24 (1974): 66–67.

composition of songs in honor of the Virgin, it is undeniable that any inclusion of humor in the texts is not an effort to blaspheme or work outside the bonds of Christian belief. In fact, one may argue that Alfonso, *avant la letter*, epitomizes another aspect of Detweiler's analysis, i.e., that "through humor one develops a free play within grace that aides the creative exploration of redemptive space."¹⁰ In other words, Alfonso did not see as incongruous the inclusion of the comedic in his Marian text but rather saw it as a vehicle to explore issues related to salvation, including his own. Another of the king's avowed purposes, to compose songs about the Virgin miracles which were delightful to sing,¹¹ implies that the songs will be both edifying and entertaining. The king's absolute belief in the Virgin and Her miraculous powers also confirm Hyer's affirmation that humor "presupposes a familiarity with the sacred, a basis in the sacred, a relationship sufficiently established to permit the freedom of humor."¹²

Alfonso's relationship with the Virgin, as portrayed in the *Cantigas* is clearly related to this idea of narrowing the gap between the sacred and the worldly planes. The king addresses Mary as his liege lady, pledges to be her troubadour, and enjoys her special favor both as man and as sovereign. Alfonso's desire to minimize the physical distance between himself and the Virgin is related to the use of humor which also serves to narrow the gulf between the sacred and the profane.

But there is another seemingly contradictory theory about humor that claims that humor occurs when we distance ourselves from a situation or person.¹³ This theory seems to be diametrically opposed to the idea that humor arises when we close the gap between the sacred and the profane. But, in fact, both these theories of the comic are simultaneously at play in the *cantigas*. These songs bring the Virgin into the realm of human activities while, at the same time, the readers/listeners as spectators view the sinners and their plights as separate from their immediate experience. In other words, the audience can feel detached and even superior to the protagonists while learning valuable spiritual lessons in an entertaining format.

A good example of how these ideas play themselves out in the CSM is found in miracle *no.* 327. It tells the story of a priest whose legs are turned backwards

¹⁰ Detweiler, "The Jesus Jokes," 70.

¹¹ Fezo cantares e so s,
saborosos de canter (I, 54).

[He (King Alfonso) composed songs and melodies which are delightful to sing] (1).

¹² Hyers, "The Dialectic," 238.

¹³ Bergson has called this distance necessary for the comic a "callousness to social life" (Henri Bergson, *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*, trans. Cloudesley Brereton and Fred Rothwell (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1928), 134. We laugh at a person or situation when the individual or his plight ceases to affect us on the level of sentiment or emotion. According to Hyers, "humor is a mechanism of withdrawal and objectification; it is an act of separation, distancing, and detachment" ("The Dialectic," 219).

because he made undergarments from an altar cloth. This song combines both the objectification necessary for the comic as well as the familiarity with the sacred. The priest/protagonist of this *cantiga* is identified as the Other—i.e., he is apart from us as a group and we enjoy a sense of superiority about his dilemma simply because it is happening to him and not us. Secondly, this poem bridges that gap between the sacred and the profane, making the former more familiar by its association with something as mundane and human as undergarments. The potential taboo of misusing a religious object, here an altar cloth, is mitigated by humor as we laugh at the helpless plight of the sinner in *Cantiga* 327. In this poem, the cloth poem was given as a gift to the church of Holy Mary in Odemira in the province of Baixo Alentejo in Portugal. It was delicate and finely woven (“mui ben teçudo e mui delgad’ outrossi”) and measured a *vara*, a length of about .835 meters or 2.7 feet. A priest in the church covets the fine cloth, steals it, and makes undershorts from it:

Un crerigo da eigreja que o viu aly seer,
 creceu-ll’ en tal cobiça que o foi log’ en toller,
 e levou-o a ssa casa e mandou ende fazer
 panos con que cobriiss’ ende o con que ya peccar (III, 158).

[“A priest of the church who saw it there began to covet it so greatly that he stole it and took it to his house and had undergarments made from it with which to cover his sinful parts” (397)].

The fact that the text specifies that these undergarments are to hide his sinful parts, could imply, too, that this priest has been guilty of more than the sin of theft.

When he puts on his new whitey-tighties to go to bed, he is most uncomfortable because his heels begin to press into his thighs and he cannot unclench them. He calls out to Holy Mary to save him from his agony and he confesses the sin of stealing the cloth intended for Her altar. This confession is made in a loud voice so that people come running to his aid. In his pain and distress, the priest loses all sense of decorum or modesty, loudly proclaiming the unholy state of his “Fruit of the Looms.” Those who hear his lament and confession carry him to the church where they pray for his deliverance from the Virgin. She, of course, immediately restores his legs to their normal configuration and all present praise Mary for the miracle. The *cantiga* also contains a firm warning:

E porende, meus amigos, quen este miragr’ oyr
 nunca seja atrevudo ena Virgen desonrrar (III, 158).

[“Therefore, my friends, may anyone who hears this miracle never be so bold as to dishonor the Virgin,” 397).

We are the “meus amigos” as distinct from the sinful priest and the humor we have enjoyed at his expense should be beneficial to us. Beyond just laughing at

him, we are to learn from this tale; dishonoring the Virgin brings dishonor and humiliation on the perpetrator.

Henri Bergson in his classic essay, *Laughter*, stresses the mechanical nature of laughter, i.e., we laugh at a person the more his/her actions resemble those of a machine rather than the ever-adapting, fluid, and compensating behaviors usually exhibited by humans. He states that "Any incident is comic that calls our attention to the physical in a person, when it is the moral side that is concerned."¹⁴ I can think of no better example of this principle than that of the wayward priest in *Cantiga* 327. The disabling deformity he experiences when he misuses the fine cloth intended for the Virgin's altar becomes comic precisely because we react initially to his physical condition rather than the moral one. We are struck by the poor man's battle with his underwear and we laugh before we can stop ourselves to consider the moral implications of his actions and his subsequent punishment at the hands of the Virgin. Later in his essay, Bergson comments that "In laughter we always find an unavowed intention to humiliate, and consequently to correct our neighbor, if not in his will, at least in his deed."¹⁵ The effect of Mary's revenge is neatly illustrated by this observation of Bergson: we laugh because we, the audience, witness the priest's humiliation and this humiliation contributes to his eventual repentance. The fact that it is a priest, a societal guardian of moral behavior, adds to the listeners'/readers' sense of superiority now that an authority figure has been so deformed as to be comical. We, as audience, enjoy a collective, or what Bergson would call a societal, act of correction for the priest's misguided behavior.

The mechanical functioning of the body as a source for the comic as defined by Bergson is also clearly evident in *Cantiga* 47. To recap this tale briefly, a monk who diligently obeys the rules of his order, one day is tempted by the devil. He succumbs to the temptation to overindulge in wine in the monastery cellar. The monk becomes quite drunk and the devil appears to him in the form of bull about to charge him. He calls out for help to the Virgin; Mary appears and shoos the beast away saying "Vai ta via, muit' es de mal solaz" (I, 174; "Go away, you are disgusting," 63). Next the devil appears to the drunk monk in the form of a wild man; again the monk calls out to the Virgin for help, she appears, and throws out the hideous creature. Finally, just as the monk is about to escape into the church, the devil again appears to him, this time in the form of a lion. The same scenario repeats—the monk calls on the Virgin who appears and drives off the lion brandishing a stick and saying, "Tol-t', astroso, e logo te desfaz" (I, 174; "Scat, infamous creature, disappear right now," 63). After this third and final fright, the Virgin again appears to the monk, reprimands him, and reminds him not to misbehave in the future.

¹⁴ Bergson, *Laughter*, 50–51.

¹⁵ Bergson, *Laughter*, 136.

Inebriation is funny precisely because, in such a state, our actions, according to Bergson, are more mechanical than natural.¹⁶ We cannot control with fluidity either our actions or our speech. When we witness a human being acting in such a limited fashion, we are laughing at him/her. According to Bergson, we are reacting to a kind of absentmindedness on the part of the inebriated individual.¹⁷ Adding to the comic effect in this *Cantiga* is the repetition of events—the appearance of the devil in various guises, the monk's fear and disorientation when confronted with these threats, and the arrival of the Virgin to rescue the monk. Bergson calls repetition a central element in classic comedy and relates it to moral issues. Our delight in the repetition of words or events becomes comic when we allow some repressed feeling to go off, like in a spring mechanism, and then we repress that feeling only to delight in experiencing it again. In other words, the inebriated monk when first confronted by the bull and reacts so timidly, we laugh, the Virgin appears, and saves him, a miraculous event which causes us to repress our laughter and replace the comic with a feeling of awe. But we enjoy laughing at the monk, so when his plight is repeated, this time in confrontation with a wild man, the spring device to release laughter is already primed to go off. And we delightfully pass through the whole process again—one of release and subsequent repression of feeling.¹⁸ The third variation on the monk's predicament has been more than sufficiently anticipated and we once again enjoy the laughter until the Virgin appears to undo the comic situation.

The Virgin's final admonition to the monk is quite gentle. She simply tells him to "Oy mais te guarda e non seas malvaz" (I, 175; "Be careful from now on and do not misbehave," 63). Sharon King sees devils in their various disguises as a type of "comic relief" in *Cantiga* 47: "The helpless monk, tottering and staggering away from these apparitions as Mary dispatches them, is surely . . . [a] source of humor in this *cantiga*."¹⁹ The tottering and staggering postures which King points out are certainly part of the mechanical appearance which Bergson identifies as the primary source for laughing at our fellow human beings. Keller and Kinkade elaborate on this point in their study of the miniatures of *Cantiga* 47 in which they cite the monk's "vacuous expression and his dangling hand, until he falls to his knees in repentance," and state that his appearance "would have delighted the

¹⁶ Bergson also discusses the relationship of the comic to vices: "however intimately vice [in this case, drunkenness] is associated with persons, it none the less retains its simple, independent existence, it remains the central character, present though invisible, in which the characters of flesh and blood on the stage are attached. At times it delights in dragging them down with its own weight and making them share in its tumbles." (Bergson, *Laughter*, 15–16)

¹⁷ See especially his discussion of absentmindedness on pages 10–14.

¹⁸ See Bergson's discussion of the Jack-in-the-box on pages 69–77 of *Laughter*.

¹⁹ Sharon King, "Wicked Laughter: The Devil as a Source of Humor in the *Cantigas de Santa Maria*," *Bulletin of the Cantigueiros de Santa Maria* 1.2 (1988): 129–38; 131. needs full pagination

popular mind."²⁰ Keller and Kinkade also tie the humor in this *cantiga* to criticism of the clergy, a ripe field for Alfonso X who constantly battled to establish the precedence of royal over ecclesiastic power in his kingdoms.

A delightfully innocent situation provokes humor in another of the *Cantigas*, the tale numbered 64. A nobleman marries a beautiful young woman and, after several years of marital bliss the husband is called away to war by his lord. The wife asks her husband to appoint a protector for her in his absence. In church, the following day, the husband informs his wife that he has chosen none other than the Blessed Virgin herself to be her guardian. After the nobleman departs, a knight sets his sight on the young wife and persuades one of the lady's servants to plead his case to her mistress. The servant suggests that the knight offer the wife a present as a token of his affection. He sends her a fine pair of shoes made from Cordovan leather. At first the noblewoman wants nothing to do with the gift, but the servant convinces her that there can be no harm in simply trying them on. When she finally consents and slips into one of the shoes, she finds that she can neither fit her foot into the shoe or remove it:

Mais a mesquinna, que cuidava que era ben,
fillou logo as çapatas, e fez y mal sen;
ca u quis calça-la hũa delas, ja per ren
fazer nono pode, nena do pee sacar. (I, 214)

[“The poor girl, thinking it could do no harm, took the shoes, a foolish thing to do. When she tried to put one of them on, she could not get her foot into it, nor take it off;” 82].

She remains in this state for a year and a month and the text states that “although two or three people tried to pull it off, they could never get it loose”: “macar de toller-lla provaron dous nen tres, / nunca lla poderon daquel pee descalçar” (I, 215). When the nobleman returns the wife shows him her plight and confesses all to him. He responds by forgiving her, credits the Virgin with putting her in this predicament to protect her honor, and removes the shoe with no problem.²¹ Bergson's theory of laughter produced when we view others acting in a mechanical way, i.e., an awkward posturing unnatural to human action is certainly

²⁰ John E. Keller and Richard P. Kinkade, *Iconography in Medieval Spanish Literature* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1984), 33.

²¹ The erotic symbol of the shoe should not be overlooked in this tale of “potential” adultery. Carlo Nordio notes that “The introduction of the foot into the shoe would be a substitute for intercourse, rendered even more exciting and perverse by the fact that it is a woman herself possessing herself. The unconscious desire from the man to the partner anticipates its satisfaction with a symbolic gesture.” verb is missing “Mystery of a Passion,” in *Shoes: Objects of Art and Seduction*, ed. Paola Buratto Caovilla (Milan: Skira Editore, 1998), 139. It appears to be no accident that the gift chosen by the would-be suitor is a pair of shoes.

applicable to this tale.²² The poor woman forced to live for over a year with a half-on, half-off shoe is clumsy and ridiculous at best. Also, the fact that no real sin occurred on her part makes this tale precautionary in nature and in its innocent plot we can also appreciate the power of humor to narrow the distance between the sacred and the profane. Here, Holy Mary's intervention is gentle yet effective and readers realize that no task is too great or too small for those who call on her protection or aid.

Beyond the inclusion of comical situations as illustrated in the previous examples, Alfonso and his collaborators also include allusions to laughter in the miracle accounts. References to laughter are varied. In *Cantiga 21*, for example, laughter is mentioned in a pitiable situation. In this tale, a barren woman prays to the Virgin to give her a son. Mary intervenes and the woman gives birth to a son who dies shortly thereafter of a fever. The distraught mother takes the child to a monastery, places his body before the altar, and pleads with the Virgin to revive her son. In her prayer, she references the joy Mary had had from Her own Son and begs that she be allowed to enjoy that same happiness: "polo prazer que do teu ouveste / Fillo, dá-m' este meu qeu veja riir" (I, 112; "For the sake of the pleasure you had from your own Son, give me mine so that I may see him smile,"²³ 30).

Laughter is also used in the contrastive phrase, "chorand' e non riindo" (II, 54; "weeping and far from mirth,"²⁴ 143) as in *Cantiga 115*. This is the tale of a woman who gives her son to the devil because she is angry with her husband who had obliged her to have sex on Easter Day and the child had been conceived when relations between husband and wife were forbidden by the church.²⁵ Moreover, after having several children this couple had vowed to longer have sexual relations.²⁶ But the husband was tempted by the devil and despite his wife's protests, he impregnates her and she vows to hand the child so sinfully conceived over to the devil. When the boy reaches twelve years of age, the devil tries to claim him but his mother sends him to see the Pope who first counsels him to go to Syria to consult with a holy man. This holy man sends the boy to a hermit in Antioch

²² "The attitudes, gestures and movements of the human body are laughable in exact proportion as that body reminds us of a mere machine" (Bergson, *Laughter*, 29).

²³ Although Kulp-Hill translates "riir" here as "smile," the verb actually means "to laugh." The meaning here is that the woman wants to see her son laugh again, implying that the Virgin had enjoyed the Christ Child's laughter.

²⁴ Again Kulp-Hill avoids the work "laughter" in her translation despite the fact that the phrase literally means "crying and not laughing."

²⁵ Brundage has found that the penitentials required married couples to refrain from sex throughout Lent, on major feast days, and on Sundays. James A. Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 157–59.

²⁶ On the concept of chaste marriage see Jo Ann McNamara, "Chaste Marriage and Clerical Celibacy," in *Sexual Practices and the Medieval Church*, eds. Vern L. Bullough and James Brundage (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1982), 22–33.

who counsels him to pray for the Virgin to defend him from the devil. The hermit assures the boy that his soul will be healed and belong thereafter to Heaven, where there is always laughter and joy: “ta alma sã / e certãa / será de Parayso, / u á riso / sempre e alegria” (II, 53). However, when the priest is saying mass the following day, the devils sneak in and steal the boy away. Holy Mary confronts them and they are forced to release the child. Meanwhile, the hermit is greatly distressed that the boy has disappeared. In describing his anguish the poet includes the phrase “chorand’ e non riindo.” But the boy soon reappears and the hermit assures him that from now on he will be safe from the devil. The long and complicated plot of *Cantiga 115* uses laughter both as a characteristic of paradise and in contrastive phrasing with weeping.

Similarly in *Cantiga 75*, the Virgin assures a righteous old woman who is dying that she will soon enjoy the pleasures of Paradise where there is always “goyo e riso” (I, 247).²⁷ And in *Cantiga 139*, the poet asserts that those who please God will be rewarded with a place in heaven where there is “goyo e riso” (II, 113). In a poem near the end of the collection (no. 422), included in a series on Feast Days, the poet asserts that Mary will pray for the faithful on the Day of Judgment. This *cantiga* assures us that if the Virgin takes the role of advocate and pleads for the forgiveness of sinners on that day, Christ will take them to live in Paradise where “alegria ajamos por senpr’ e riso” (III, 351; “we may have joy and laughter forevermore,” 509).

Weeping turned to laughter is also a motif in *Cantiga 143*. The plot here is quite simple—the people of Jerez are suffering from a drought and a friar tells the people to pray with him to the Virgin Mary for rain. As the townsfolk weep and implore the Virgin to send them rain, the clouds open up and “quantos choravan fezo riir / e yr con grand’ alegria” (II, 122; “caused all who were weeping to laugh and go their way happily,” 176). In another tale, *Cantiga 219*, worshippers laugh at a statue of the devil that the Virgin has caused to turn from white to black. The miracle tells of a bishop of Tuscany who had figures carved in white marble for his church. Among the statues are one of the Virgin and also one of the devil. However, since the latter is as white as Mary’s statue due to the common material from which they are carved, the poem tells us that the demonic figure does not appear as loathsome as it should. Of her own volition, the Virgin causes the statue of the devil to turn black and no amount of scrubbing can restore the marble to its original color. When the faithful come to the church, they react with laughter that the devil’s image has been thus transformed: “Outro dia, quand’ as gentes v eron missa oyr / e viron o demo negro, fillaron-s’ end’ a rriir” (II, 282; “The next day

²⁷ Kulp-Hill translates this phrase as “eternal joy and pleasure” but “riso” is literally translated as “laughter.” Thus, the joys in Heaven include delight in laughter.

when the people came to hear mass and saw the devil was black, they began to laugh," 263).²⁸

A delightful example of childhood laughter within a serious plot line is found in *Cantiga* 282. In this tale, a young boy falls from a tall roof to the ground and his parents and nursemaid run to his aid, expecting to find him seriously injured or dead. However, when they arrive to the spot where he had fallen, he has jumped to his feet and is frolicking about and laughing: "trebellando e riindo" (III, 58). The adults asks him if he is hurt and the boy responds that while he was falling he called out to Holy Mary who had caught him in Her arms so that he came to land unharmed in any way. The boy's obvious glee at his rescue reveals both relief and celebration when he finds himself not injured in the least.

In sharp contrast to the boyish laughter in *Cantiga* 282, a child's laugher is viewed in a negative light in *Cantiga* 79. In this miracle, a young girl named Musa is characterized as frivolous and flighty; when the Virgin appears to her, the young girl is eager to go with Her but Mary tells her that she must give up "ris' e jogo" (laughter and play) if she wishes to join her company. Musa begins to act more seriously and after thirty days she falls ill and dies. But, the poem assures us that her soul immediately joined those of the saints in heaven.

An unusual example of the word "rissona" ("laughingly" or "smiling") is employed in *Cantiga* 7. This is the tale of an abbess who becomes pregnant but when she prays to the Virgin she is miraculously delivered of the child and her body bears no trace of the pregnancy.²⁹ When the nuns of her convent accuse her of becoming pregnant she is summoned before the Bishop who comes to investigate. Secure in her belief that Mary will conceal her condition, the abbess appears before the bishop "leda e mui rissona" (I, 76) ["cheerful and smiling"] (13). Thus, although the abbess is guilty of the sin of which her nuns accuse her, her confidence in the Virgin to rescue her from embarrassment and punishment is clearly apparent on her smiling face, a false façade certainly for sin but nonetheless effective in this situation.

Another source of humor in the *Cantigas de Santa Maria* involves racial stereotypes, i.e., demeaning the Other as a source of group amusement.³⁰ Obviously forms of racial/ethnic/group based comedy are bound by the historical

²⁸ Hyers speaks of Devil as the subject of comedy in Christian circles: "the popular representation of him in a red suit, with forked tail and horns, and with an impish glint in his eye" ("The Dialectic of the Sacred and the Comic," 228).

²⁹ For further examples of the wayward nun in the CSM see my article, "Verbalization and Visualization in MS. T.I.1 of the *Cantigas de Santa Maria*: The Theme of the Runaway Nun," in *Studies on the Cantigas de Santa Maria: Art, Music, and Poetry. Proceedings of the International Symposium on the Cantigas de Santa Maria of Alfonso X, el Sabio (1221–1284) in Commemoration of its 700th Anniversary Year—1981 (New York, November 19–21)*, ed. Israel J. Katz and John E. Keller (Madison, WI: Hispanic Seminary of Medieval Studies, 1987), 135–54.

³⁰ See also the contribution to this volume by Birgit Wiedl.

and social circumstances in which they manifest themselves. But even for a text composed in Spain in the thirteenth century, we can examine how the phenomenon of racial stereotyping with humorous intent found its way into a religious text. Bergson's theories about the superiority we feel when humor befalls another is a good starting place to deal with this topic.³¹ Also helpful is a fascinating essay by Christie Davies entitled, "The Irish Joke as A Social Phenomenon," which appears in the collection *Laughing Matters: A Serious Look at Humor*.³² According to Davies, the Irish joke, i.e., the racial stereotyping of another group to assert the superiority of one's own group, is international and historically universal. Davies also says that, for such a joke to be funny, the group which is the brunt of the joke must be peripheral and not large enough to actually be a threat to the dominant group. In Alfonsine Spain, while incursions from Muslims were still a threat in Christian controlled areas of the peninsula, Jews constituted an ethnic minority which posed no immediate danger and were thus excellent targets for racially-based humor. Many of the *Cantigas* overtly portray Jews as foolish, greedy, or gullible. For example, in *Cantiga 108* a Jew denies the incarnation of Christ and the Virgin birth in a theological discussion with Merlin (an unusual character in this collection and an unusual choice for Christian spokesman). The Jew's statement so angers Merlin that he prays God to have the Jewish man's wife give birth to a son with his head on backwards, i.e., with his head facing over his buttocks. In answer to Merlin's prayer, the boy is born thus deformed and the father tries to kill the child immediately after his birth. But Merlin saves the child and uses him as an instrument to show God's power against all who would dare to doubt the Virgin birth of the Savior. Not only is the Jew portrayed as capable of infanticide, he also stubbornly refuses to acknowledge a key component of Christian faith.

The fact that the deformed child becomes a kind of visual aid for Merlin's proselytizing efforts at first appears as a simple act of cruelty involving an innocent child. But, when we confront the stunning miniatures which accompany this tale we cannot help but laugh as we look at the hapless child who must forever stare out at the world over his backside. In the case of the child and his father, the Jewish characters are depicted as worthy of scorn and physical deformity because of a lack of belief in the Virgin. In Bergsonian terms, the child has ceased to be completely human and now more resembles some sort of misshapen machine or tool in the arsenal of tools to convert non-Christians.

³¹ Much more controversial are Bergson's assertions that the Negro (his term) is inherently comic because our imagination perceives him as a white man in disguise, thus causing us to laugh at him (*Laughter*, 40–1).

³² Christie Davies, "The Irish Joke as a Social Phenomenon," in *Laughing Matters: A Serious Look at Humour*, eds. John Durant and Jonathan Miller (New York: Longman Scientific and Technical and John Wiley & Sons, 1988), 44–65.

The comic potential in racial stereotyping combines, quite literally, with bathroom humor in *Cantiga* 34.³³ The Jew in this *cantiga* behaves atrociously and is killed by the devil, a character who, as we have seen, can also be exploited for comic potential. The text is set in Constantinople where a beautiful painted image of the Virgin is publically displayed. The artistic quality of the icon is emphasized in the poem:

Hũa omage pintada na rua siya
 en tavao, mui ben feita, de Santa Maria,
 que no podian achar ontr'outras mais de cento
 tan fremosa (I, 143)

["There was in the street a well-made image of Holy Mary, painted on wood. It was so beautiful that even if one examined more than a hundred, not another to equal it could be found"; 45.]

A Jew, the stereotypical embodiment of evil, steals the beautiful image one night, takes it home, places it in his privy and defecates on it. This shocking series of events is narrated succinctly and the shock that the sacred object so wondrously described has suffered this fate is both unsettling and potentially comic. Adding to the humor is an explicit miniature of the Jew in his privy, defiling the painting of Mary. The mere fact of such direct reference to an activity circumscribed by social decorum and taboo certainly throws, literally, the sacred into the realm of the profane. Laughter at this blasphemous scene would momentarily alleviate moral outrage or, as Bergson would say, the scene is comic because it our calls our attention to the physical (in this case, defecation) when it is actually a moral issue which is of concern here.³⁴ The treacherous Jew is immediately condemned for his outrage, killed by the devil and whisked away to hell leaving no trace of his existence: "o demo o levou que nunc' apareçudo" (I, 143). A conscientious Christian braves the disgusting privy, described as an "evil-smelling hole" ("logar balorento"), removes the painting, washes it thoroughly and sets it up in a place of honor in his home. Miraculously, even though the icon had been in the privy and soiled, it nonetheless gave off a beautiful fragrance. From then on, a precious oil-like substance issues from the icon to remind all that not even the feces of a Jew could sully the Virgin's image. Of course, the Jew here is the embodiment of evil and anti-Christian sentiment. He is directly associated with excrement and the act

³³ Bathroom humor, i.e., that associates with bodily functions, stems from the relationship of the comic to the taboo. Such humor, according to Freud, is a way to regain childhood pleasure and lack of inhibition in a realm which has been become shrouded in propriety, decorum, and even guilt in adulthood. Sigmund Freud, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, ed. and trans. James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1960), 236. See also the contribution to this volume by Elizabeth Chesney Zegura.

³⁴ Bergson, *Laughter*, 50–51.

of defecation—societal taboos which produce laughter until our moral sensibilities are once again able to gain the upper hand.

Alfonso fully exploited humor as a rhetorical tool to establish both the educational and delightful potential in Marian narratives. As a sincere devotee of the Virgin, he did not view laughter as a blasphemous intrusion into a sacred text but as an integral ingredient in that text. As Hyers points out, laughter within the realm of the sacred emerges from a position of surety and thanksgiving in one's faith.³⁵ As we have seen, Alfonso uses humor in the CSM to bridge the gap between the profane and the sacred. At the same time, he presents many of the characters as laughing subject or as the object of our laughter. We feel distanced from plight of the hapless sinner who finds him/herself acting in a humorous situation even as we laugh at, or with him/her. As Bergson points out, we react immediately with laughter to the individual who acts in a mechanical way before any feeling of empathy emerges to squash our initial response. Even in a situation which should inspire awe, such as a miracle performed by the Virgin Mary, the feeling of wonder in the presence of the sacred is kept at bay while we laugh at the risible predicament of the character in need of divine intervention. In the CSM, Alfonso displays human frailties in contrast to the Virgin's omnipotence and provokes what Bergson has called the societal corrective of laughter. We learn through laughing at another's expense and the religious lesson is in no way diminished by that act. While the idea of using humor to sweeten a moral lesson is certainly not original or unique in the CSM, Alfonso's forays into the comic are but one example of his ability to create tales which arouse a host of emotions in his audience. We are instructed, inspired, and fascinated by the Virgin's powers. We realize that no situation is beyond her capacity to intervene and correct. In his position as "author" or "auctoritas" of the *Cantigas de Santa Maria*, Alfonso in both picture and verse portrays himself in a position of familiarity with Holy Mary. He is the conduit which channels these stories to the listeners, who are free to laugh at others even as we are exhorted to examine our own lives and behave in a manner always pleasing to the Virgin.

³⁵ Hyers, "The Dialectic," 240.

Chapter 8

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The Son Rebelled and So the Father Made Man Alone: Ridicule and Boundary Maintenance in the *Nizzahon Vetus*¹

In a medieval Jewish polemical work known to modern readers as the *Nizzahon Vetus* or the *Nizzahon Yashan*, “The Old Polemic”² (thirteenth century), we find a curious response to a common example of Christian exegesis. The text seems to accept Christian reading of the Deity’s use of the first person plural during the Genesis account—“Let us make man . . .”—as an endorsement of the doctrine of the Trinity. In such passages, Christians say that the one God addresses His Three Persons. The *Nizzahon Yashan*, rather surprisingly, agrees and gives the full story:

Indeed, the matter is as you say. The father told the son, “My son, help me, and let you and I make man.” However, the son rebelled and did not wish to help his father, and so the father made man alone without the son’s help, as it is written, “And God created man,” with a singular rather than a plural verb. Consequently, the father became angry with his son and said, “If the time should come when you need my assistance, I shall not help you just as you have not helped me.” So when the day came for the son to be stoned and hanged, he cried out in a bitter voice, “My Lord, my lord, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me . . .?” and he begged for his help [Matt. 27: 46]. Then the father told him, “When I asked you to help me make man, you

¹ The following paper marks a return to a research question initiated while the author was supported by funding from a Research Assistantship in the Humanities from the Davis Humanities Institute at the University of California, Davis. The author wishes to thank the Davis Humanities Institute for their support and Professor David Biale for supervising the initial project.

² I will use both *Nizzahon Vetus* and *Nizzahon Yashan*, and occasionally just *Nizzahon*, to avoid monotony. Thus most references to the “*Nizzahon*,” should be taken to refer to the *Nizzahon Yashan* unless context makes it clear that another text is the referent.

rebelled against me and did not come to the aid of the Lord, and so my own power availed me and I made him without you. Now you too help yourself, for I shall not come to your aid.”³

Of course, this playful story cannot be taken too seriously. No medieval Jew intent upon remaining such could make a claim like this and mean it. Instead the little story occurs amidst other responses to the alleged divine plurality of Genesis. In the text immediately preceding this passage, the *Nizzahon Vetus* offers an interpretation of humanity’s creation as a collaboration between God and the earth. God has it in mind that Earth will supply the dust while He provides the Spirit. Before that, the *Nizzahon Yashan* simply suggests that it is a quite mundane example of the Royal We, much as “noblemen, who are flesh and blood, write of a single individual in the plural to this day” (no. 4; English, 42; Hebrew, 4).

But there is a serious point to be derived from the jest.⁴ Medieval Jews were quite capable of laughing in the face of pressure from the dominant Christian society. The following paper examines the ways in which Christianity is made to look like a laughable and undesirable alternative to Judaism in the *Nizzahon Vetus*. It agrees with those interpretations of Jewish polemics against Christianity that view them as attempts to draw social boundaries between Jews and Christians. Heightened consciousness of difference across those boundaries cultivated a sense of solidarity amongst the text’s presumably Jewish readers, and so discouraged apostasy. However, in this paper I will argue that this was not just an act of resistance, aggressively countering Christian hegemony. Rather I underscore the conservative functions of such social disciplining, pointing out how the *Nizzahon Vetus* makes use of ridicule and embarrassment to discourage Jews from straying from the fold.

It needs to be said from the outset that, divorced from historical context, much of the material in the *Nizzahon Vetus* that ridicules Christians and Christianity might seem distasteful to modern readers.⁵ Although scholars contest the causes,

³ *Sefer Nizzahon Yashan*, no. 5, in David Berger, *The Jewish-Christian Debate in the High Middle Ages: A Critical Edition of the Nizzahon Vetus with an Introduction, Translation, and Commentary* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1979), 42–43 (English), 4–5 (Hebrew). Unless otherwise noted, all translations of the *Nizzahon Yashan* are Berger’s. Most lengthy citations will be handled parenthetically, listing the unit number cited, followed by the page numbers of the English and Hebrew versions of the text. Briefer passing citations will appear in footnotes.

⁴ Thomas Willard’s discussion of Menippean satire in the *Chemical Wedding* of Johann Valentin Andreae, in this volume, is worth citing in this connection. The willingness to play with Christian ideas to make a point to readers of the text may well be described as a ludibrium, or joke meant to communicate a meaningful idea. Like Andreae, the authors and editors responsible for the *Nizzahon Vetus* would quickly distance themselves from any claim that talking about Jesus as the son of God should be taken seriously.

⁵ For an excellent brief discussion of the hesitation many scholars have exhibited in dealing with Jewish anti-Christian polemic, including the controversy surrounding Israel Yuval’s discussion

turning points, and severity, these statements occurred within a context of Christian persecution of Jews during the high and late Middle Ages. Jewish communities were attacked by Crusaders in Germany beginning in the eleventh century. Proselytizing among the Jews increased as well. Preachers entered Jewish communities and synagogues to deliver sermons, often with the backing of local authorities. Disputations were staged between representatives of the Jewish communities and Christians. Here converts from Judaism, like Petrus Alfonsi, often played the lead role, using their knowledge of Judaism to attack their former co-religionists. Eventually, forced conversions and local expulsions began to follow. This period also saw the rise of libelous accusations of ritual murder, desecration of the Eucharist, and cannibalistic use of Christian blood.⁶

Scholars such as Salo Baron, Joseph Shatzmiller, and more recently David Nirenberg, have devoted considerable attention to criticizing the lachrymose view of Jewish history that reads such Christian persecutions as an unrelenting onslaught that led inevitably and inexorably to the Holocaust.⁷ Nirenberg, for example, has argued that large scale violence of the kind seen in pogroms and massacres of later centuries was relatively rare and that when it occurred it was the result of specific local pressures rather than pan-European ideological impulses. More common was the occasional violence of small groups of youths

of mass suicide among medieval Ashkenazim, see Alexandra Cuffel, *Gendering Disgust in Medieval Religious Polemic* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 2–3.

⁶ Birgit Wiedl's contribution to this volume examines the application of bestial characteristics to Jews in the *Judensau* imagery found in the German-speaking world. Her observation that the *Judensau* develops from an illustration of sin for Christian viewers, using Jews as an example, to a depiction of Jews themselves meant to publicly deride them is representative of the perception that Jewish-Christian relations steadily worsened through the later Middle Ages and Early Modern periods. Efforts to determine the nature and causes of shifting relations between medieval Jews and Christians, particularly in search of a definable point at which a medieval Christian culture of persecution came into existence, have been extensive. A small, representative sample of such literature includes Anna Sapir Abulafia, *Christians and Jews in the Twelfth-Century Renaissance* (New York and London: Routledge, 1995); Robert Chazan, *Daggers of Faith: Thirteenth-Century Christian Missionizing and Jewish Response* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989); Robert Chazan, *Medieval Stereotypes and Modern Antisemitism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Jeremy Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews: The Evolution of Medieval Anti-Judaism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982); Jeremy Cohen, *Living Letters Of The Law: Ideas Of The Jew In Medieval Christianity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Amos Funkenstein, *Perceptions of Jewish History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); R. I. Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society: Power and Deviance in Western Europe, 950–1250* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1987).

⁷ Salo Baron, "Ghetto and Emancipation: Shall We Revise the Traditional View?," *The Menorah Journal* 14 (June 1928): 515–26. Joseph Shatzmiller, *Shylock Reconsidered: Jews, Moneylending, and Medieval Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); and Shatzmiller, *Jews, Medicine, and Medieval Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); David Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence: Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

throwing stones and disrupting commerce, but physically harming few, that often accompanied Christian holidays. Nirenberg maintains that such low-level violence actually served to contain and ritualize Christian animosity toward Jews, thereby marking out acceptable limits for Jewish presence and activity within Christendom.⁸

But it remains safe to say that, surrounded by a dominant Christian society whose toleration of Jews was inconsistent at best, medieval Jews often found themselves in a difficult and very tenuous position. Conflict between Jews and Christians, whatever its extent and social functions, was real. Frequently, it was initiated by Christians. Anti-Christian polemical literature provided an important means of offering resistance and maintaining social boundaries. It is in that context that the following comments need to be interpreted.

Sefer Nizzahon Yashan is a virtual catalog of typical exegetical arguments against Christianity, but relatively little is known about the text. Frequent use of German places it within the Ashkenazi world of Western and Central Europe. David Berger, who has prepared a critical edition of the text, dates it to the later thirteenth century because none of its identifiable sources date from later than the mid-thirteenth century.⁹ Others have dated it as late as the early fourteenth centuries. Analyses of the *Sefer Nizzahon Yashan* are further complicated by confusion surrounding the actual text itself. The book has been mistaken for other works bearing the title “Nizzahon,” most notably the more famous *Sefer ha-Nizzahon* by the early fifteenth-century Rabbi Yom Tov Lipmann Muhlhausen. In fact, the term “*yashan*,” meaning “old” in Hebrew, is appended to the title primarily to distinguish it from Lipmann’s *Nizzahon*.¹⁰

The best known edition of the text was actually printed by a Christian Johannes Wagenseil in 1681 in his collection of polemics called the *Tela Ignea Satannae*—“The Fiery Arrows of Satan.” He preserved the Hebrew text (with some errors and emendations, it seems) of a now lost manuscript from Strasbourg. Another partial manuscript, reproducing approximately forty percent of the *Nizzahon Vetus*, is extant in the Munich Staatsbibliothek, Hebrew Manuscript no. 147. A third manuscript that shares much of its content with the *Sefer Nizzahon Yashan* exists as part of Hebrew manuscript no. 53 in the Vittorio Emanuele Library in Rome. However, the organization of that material is very different, such that the Rome manuscript is more likely a source for the *Sefer Nizzahon Yashan* than a copy of it. Other useful manuscripts include two other editions derived from the Wagenseil

⁸ Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*.

⁹ Berger, *The Jewish-Christian Debate in the High Middle Ages*, 33.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 32–33

edition as well as manuscripts of the *Sefer Yosef ha-Meqanne*, as that text seems to have served as a source for the *Nizzahon Yashan*.¹¹

The organization of the *Nizzahon Vetus* roughly follows that of the Christian Bible. The book breaks down into short sections, each providing a line of argument against a specific Christian use of the Bible. The text's methods largely derive from traditional exegetical literature and involve examination of specific passages of scripture, often through the imposition of supplemental narrative explanation of the text's meaning.¹²

Typically, a section begins with a Christian reference to scripture regarding the virgin birth, the messianic status of Jesus, his divinity, or another point of Christian doctrine. The *Nizzahon Yashan* then tells the reader how to respond, pointing out where the Christian interpretation errs. For example, the text confronts problems stemming from claimed Christian misreading of Biblical texts, as with the treatment of the famous "*`almah*" of Isaiah. Isaiah refers to a young woman (*`almah*) giving birth to a son called Immanuel as a sign from God. The Greek Septuagint version of the text translates *`almah* as *parthenos*, which can refer either to a young woman or a virgin. Christians have taken this passage in its Greek form as a prophecy of the virgin birth. The *Nizzahon Vetus* points this out, as well as the fact that *betulah* would be the more typical word for virgin—a word which is not used in this passage (no. 84; English, 100–01; Hebrew, 55–56).

After working through the Hebrew Bible, *Sefer Nizzahon Yashan* turns to Christian sources. Here the organizational scheme breaks down somewhat as the sections no longer follow specific books but treat the New Testament as an undifferentiated mass, focusing mostly on the gospel narratives. Moreover, the *Nizzahon* includes material from extra-Biblical texts as well. But the text displays considerable knowledge of Christian scripture and some familiarity with Latin, lending support to the arguments of scholars such as David Berger, Ivan Marcus, David Nirenberg, and Israel Yuval that Christians and Jews were well aware of

¹¹ Ibid., 32–37, 373–82

¹² Midrash is one of the fundamental categories of Jewish literature and thought. Scholarly literature on the subject is staggering in its volume. Some representative works include Michael Fishbane, *The Exegetical Imagination: On Jewish Thought and Theology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998); Jacob Neusner, *Invitation to Midrash: The Workings of Rabbinic Bible Interpretation*, (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1989); and Jacob Neusner, *Midrash in Context: Exegesis in Formative Judaism*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983).

many aspects of their neighbors' religious texts and practices.¹³ Section 165 illustrates a typical comment on Christian theology:

It is written in their books: "The father is unbegotten, the son was begotten, and the spirit proceeded from both of them." It follows, then, that the father preceded the son. Moreover when he says that the spirit proceeded from both of them this necessarily implies that there was a time when there was a father and no spirit, and yet you say that the three are equal in greatness, age, indeed, in all respects: this contention, then must be ruled out whether you like it or not. The Latin in the *Quicunque vult* goes as follows: "Patrus ingenuitus, filius genitus, spiritus sanctus ab utroque procedit" (no. 165; English, 178; Hebrew, 125).

The statement attributed to the *Quicunque vult*, or Athanasian Creed, is more of a precis than a quotation, but the passage as a whole is a useful example of the treatment of Christian texts in the *Sefer Nizzahon Yashan*. It shows how the work uses Latin, including short passages that seem likely to occur in a confrontation with Christians.¹⁴

But sober analysis of Christian exegetical technique or criticism of the logic behind particular theological positions is not the only way in which the text presents Christianity as something not to be taken seriously. The text is filled with derisive comments. Its opponents are referred to as *minim* or "heretics" as often as anything else. Jesus frequently bears the name *ha-Talui*—"The Hanged One."¹⁵ In a play on the word *evangelion*, the "good news," or gospel in Greek, the *Nizzahon Vetus* occasionally adopts a punning slur not uncommon in medieval Jewish literature, calling the gospels the "*avon gilayon*," indicating that the gospel is a tissue of sinful falsehoods.¹⁶ In one line in a larger attack on the value to be associated with Jesus's miracles, the text claims that Jesus's ascent into heaven compares unfavorably with Elijah's because Elijah's was public and Jesus's ascent

¹³ David Berger, "Mission to the Jews and Jewish-Christian Contacts in the Polemical Literature of the High Middle Ages," *The American Historical Review* 91 (1986): 576–91; Ivan G. Marcus, *Rituals of Childhood: Jewish Acculturation in Medieval Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996); David Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence: Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Israel J. Yuval, "Easter and Passover as Early Jewish-Christian Dialogue," in *Passover and Easter: Origin and History to Modern Times*, ed. Paul F. Bradshaw and Lawrence A. Hoffman (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999), 98–106.

¹⁴ Furthermore, there is a mistake in the Latin—the nominative singular for "father" is "*pater*," not "*patrus*," though "*-us*" ending is a widely attested, proper nominative singular ending. While a Christian writer is unlikely to make this mistake because of the frequency with which the word appears in Christian literature, it is certainly an understandable error from a non-Christian acquainted with, though perhaps not fluent in, Latin. Berger, *The Jewish-Christian Debate in the High Middle Ages*, 315.

¹⁵ E.g., *Nizzahon Yashan*, no. 25, in *The Jewish-Christian Debate*, 58 (English), 19 (Hebrew).

¹⁶ The text's discussion of the New Testament begins with an example of this pun, *Nizzahon Yashan*, no. 154, in *The Jewish-Christian Debate*, 167 (English), 106–08 (Hebrew).

was witnessed only by Mary Magdalene and “Peter the Ass.” The pun here is on the term “*peter hamor*” which can mean either “firstling of an ass” or “Peter the Ass.”¹⁷ The *Nizzahon* author’s punning replacement of the name Miriam or Maria with “*Hariya*” — excrement — is another well-known example.¹⁸

The text contains a number of short disconnected passages that associate Jesus and Christianity with foolishness and untruth. For example,

It is written in their books that Jesus passed through a certain place and found a man “who had been sick for thirty-eight years. And Jesus said to him, Do you wish to be cured? He told him, My lord, that is what I would like. And he said to him, Take up your bed and walk. Immediately the man was cured and took up his bed and walked, and the same day was the Sabbath. The Jews therefore came to him and said, it is the Sabbath; it is not lawful to do work on the Sabbath by carrying burdens” [John 5: 5–10]. The fact is that they were right. If he cured the man, all right, but why did he command him to carry his bed? (no. 169; English, 181; Hebrew, 119).

Of course John does not have the Jews object to Jesus’s actions on the ground that he induced a man to carry something on the Sabbath. John has them object that he healed on the Sabbath. It is almost as though the hypothetical joker wishes to retreat from the implication that good works on the Sabbath are actually problematic and so has Jesus ruin his miracle with the now unnecessary work of carrying the bed.

Another pithy example: “Ask them further: Why was there no prophecy either among Israel or among other nations from the time that Jesus was hanged? It must be that the spirit of falsehood prevailed over the world to such an extent that the spirit of prophecy refrained from coming” (no. 206; English, 204; Hebrew, 143). The text for the sake of argument concedes something like the coming of a Paraclete after Jesus but inverts its spiritual value.

And then there are vignettes like the one with which this paper opened that take a more extended satirical approach to Christians’ own exegeses. Another example is occasioned by Deuteronomy 21:18, which authorizes capital punishment:

¹⁷ *Nizzahon Yashan*, no. 145, in *The Jewish-Christian Debate in the High Middle Ages*, 151–52 (English), 94–97 (Hebrew), and commentary, 302.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*; Cuffel, *Gendering Disgust*, 2, 130, 137. Further examples abound. The text may even include something of a visual pun. In a critique of Matthew 3: 5–6, which deals with the career of John the Baptist, the text asks “when people are baptized it is for the sake of the soul, for the body is considered an empty vessel before that. In that case, why do they baptize the crosses in their houses of abomination as well as all other vessels used for their idolatry such as bells and chalices? Do these too have spirit and soul?” However, instead of “chalices” the text actually reads “dogs.” The editor of the critical edition, Daniel Berger, argues that the Hebrew “*kelavim*” may have begun as a corrupted transliteration of “*calices*” (as in “calix” in the plural), which would look remarkably similar. *Nizzahon Yashan*, no. 160, in *The Jewish-Christian Debate*, 174–75 (English), 111–12 (Hebrew).

"If a man has a wayward and defiant son . . ." Rabbi Solomon son of Abun used to answer the heretics' argument from the verse, "The lord said unto my lord, Sit at my right hand" [Ps. 110:1] as follows: the father told his son, "Sit at my right hand in heaven and don't descend among your enemies the Jews until I destroy them, subdue them, and make them a footstool for you." But the son, i.e., the hanged one, was a wayward and defiant son who did not obey his father and descended in defiance of his will. The father then, in his anger, caused the Jews to judge him as a wayward and defiant son should be judged; indeed, the Jews are sons of prophets and know that this is what he actually was, and so they killed him for violating his father's command. When, however, they were unable to carry out the precise sentence of a wayward and defiant son because of his sorcery, they carried out the sentence mentioned in an adjoining verse: If a man is guilty of a capital offense is put to death, and you hang him . . ." [Deut. 21: 22] (no. 52; English, 77; Hebrew, 36).¹⁹

The Biblical verse left elliptical in the text refers to the need to remove a hanged corpse quickly before it defiles the land as every hanged man is cursed by God. This surreal and biting passage is actually quite complex. It mocks Christians' efforts to read into the Biblical text examples of the Persons of the Trinity talking amongst themselves by suggesting that three distinct Persons might have three distinct Wills. It raises the common polemical claim that Christians should not object to any people having crucified Jesus if it was part of God's plan. It also makes an allusion to the notorious *Toldot Yeshu*.

The *Toldot Yeshu* is one of the most-discussed examples of Jewish anti-Christian polemical literature. The text was certainly in existence by the ninth century, as Christians had already learned of its existence by that time. Elements and early versions may well be considerably older.²⁰ More a textual tradition than a single text, it contains and builds upon legendary material found in Talmudic and other sources, retelling the life of Jesus and parodying the events of the Gospel.²¹

¹⁹ The author attributes this latter example of the "Father scorned" motif to another author. Berger's edition gives the source as R. Solomon b. Abun, a twelfth-century poet, following the earliest extant version of the book. But he notes a variant reading in three other manuscripts that attributes it to the early thirteenth-century figure, R. Solomon b. Abraham, Berger, *The Jewish-Christian Debate in the High Middle Ages*, 264.

²⁰ Samuel Krauss, *The Jewish-Christian Controversy from the Earliest Times to 1789*, vol.1, *History*, ed. and rev. William Horbury (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1995), 12.

²¹ Amos Funkenstein, David Biale, and others have tried to understand narratives like these as examples of a particular kind of polemical writing called "counter-history." The term "counter-history" is well known in Jewish studies and has started to become familiar outside the field as well. Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt use the term, acknowledging Funkenstein as their source, as part of the title of, and a recurring theme in, one chapter of *Practicing New Historicism*. They pay little attention to its use beyond Funkenstein's work, however. Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt, *Practicing New Historicism*, 40–74. For Funkenstein, counter-history is a rhetorical tactic in which an author seeks to undermine a narrative valued by another by retelling the story in an inverted, contradictory fashion. The counter-historical author preserves

Despite the existence of multiple variants, the basic narrative follows.²² Far from the product of a pure virgin birth, Jesus is born under the most impure of conditions. His mother, Miriam, conceives Jesus in an adulterous liaison during her period of menstrual impurity. Jesus grows up, gains a reputation as a magician, and comes to the attention of authorities—including “Queen Helene”—as a result. His career comes to an ignominious end when Judas Iscariot pollutes Jesus, rendering him incapable of using the secret wonder-working name of God that Jesus had smuggled out of the Temple in the flesh of his thigh.²³ When Jesus is rendered powerless, he is captured and executed with one final humiliation. Having previously cursed all the trees of the land such that they would be unable to bear his weight, Jesus is hung from a plant variously described as a cabbage stalk or carob bush. Not being a proper tree, the plant has never been bound not to carry Jesus’s weight and can be used in his execution.²⁴

basic elements of the source story but rewrites the story such that it becomes radically revalued in the polemicist’s hands, Amos Funkenstein, *Perceptions of Jewish History*, 36–38. The danger is that such inversions do not command any more authority than the narratives they seek to undermine. To the contrary, counter-histories expose their authors to incredulity and charges of willful misinterpretation—the latter charge striking very close to the essence of counter-history in Funkenstein’s formulation, Amos Funkenstein, *Perceptions of Jewish History*). A Centennial Book (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and Oxford: University of California Press, 1993), 32–40, 48–49. David Biale has formulated a different version of counter-history. Instead of simply reversing the story in some way, counter-histories establish an oppositional narrative by accepting elements of the original narrative as true but recasts them such that their import is inverted and the system of meaning and value under-girding that story are transformed. As a result of this very process, traces of the original narrative and system of value remain with altogether different significance. Scholem’s transformation of earlier scholars’ dismissal of kabbalah as mere irrationalism into a narrative of Jewish history framed in the dialectic of the mythic irrational (evident in kabbalah) and rigorously logical (manifest in Rabbinic Judaism) is Biale’s most famous example, David Biale, *Gershom Scholem: Kabbalah and Counter-History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), 1–12, 189–205; id., “Counter-History and Jewish Polemics Against Christianity: The *Sefer Toldot Yeshu* and the *Sefer Zerubavel*,” *Jewish Social Studies* 6 (1999): 130–41. See also Erich S. Gruen, *Heritage and Hellenism: The Reinvention of Jewish Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

²² The form that is most widely known derives from Wagenseil’s *Tela Ignea Satanae* (*The Fiery Arrows of Satan*). In 1970, the 1681 edition of the text was reprinted in a modern edition. C. J. Wagenseil, *Tela Ignea Satanae* (Farnborough, UK: Gregg, 1970).

²³ Presumably Judas urinates or ejaculates upon Jesus in mid-air. The claim that he urinates on Jesus may be a later attempt to tone-down the text. Compare this with the apocryphal Acts of St. Peter in which the arch-heretic and magician Simon Magus is similarly knocked out of the sky by the power of Peter and Paul’s prayers.

²⁴ Samuel Krauss has provided the Hebrew and Aramaic text of several variant versions of the *Toldot Yeshu* tradition in his *Das Leben Jesu nach jüdischen Quellen* which are useful regardless of one’s ability to read the scholarly apparatus, Samuel Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu nach jüdischen Quellen* 3rd rpt. (1902; Hildesheim and New York: Georg Olms, 2006). English and Latin versions are available in Hugh J. Schonfield, *According to the Hebrews*. (London: Duckworth, 1937) and *Sepher Toldoth Yeshu: Book of the Generation of Jesus* (New York: D. M. Bennett, 1879), respectively.

The *Nizzahon Vetus* makes several allusions to this parody of the Gospels. In one short, potentially funny non sequitur passage such as those described earlier, the *Nizzahon Yashan* provides a rather accurate paraphrase of Luke 23: 32–43, regarding the thieves hanged on either side of Jesus. The text clearly expresses astonishment: “. . . if he was divine, why did he allow himself to undergo such a peculiar shame of being hanged between thieves and on a stalk of cabbage?” (no. 202; English, 202; Hebrew, 141). The phrasing of the text suggests that this was a common belief to which any Christian might readily assent, which of course it was not. Later it asks “When he grew up and claimed to be son of God and was therefore sentenced to death in accordance with the judgment applicable to one who entices people toward idolatry, why did he fly up into the sky in order to save himself from death until Judas Iscariot came, flew up to him, and brought him to the ground against his will and in a manner not conducive to his benefit so they could hang him?” (no. 205; English, 203–04; Hebrew, 142–43). The text here alludes to a battle described in the *Toldot Yeshu* material reminiscent of the battle between Peter and Simon Magus in the Acts of the Apostles. Judas knocks Jesus out of the sky by polluting him and cutting off his access to the Name of God.

Together, passages like these suggest a willingness on the part of pre-modern European Jews to launch discursive attacks at Christian targets when they could do so safely, ridiculing Jesus and other prominent figures, Christian exegesis, and typical Christian practice. More sober philosophical polemics against Christianity do exist, the utility of which for actual debate with Christians is readily apparent.²⁵ But the utility of the more vituperative works, like the *Nizzahon Vetus* and the *Toldot Yeshu* is more difficult to see. One possible interpretation of such ridicule is that it served as a response to external pressure—an acting out within the safe enclosure provided by the Hebrew language. Kenneth Stow suggests that as Christians became aware of Jewish polemical literature, they may have feared that Jews would be tempted to enact their derogatory comments and notes that this would have coincided with an increasing perception of Jewish aggression.²⁶

And yet the very form of the *Nizzahon Vetus*, as a compendium of responses to Christian claims and queries, demands answers regarding medieval Jews’ willingness to sally forth into open engagement with Christians in addition to planning attacks behind the seemingly safer walls of Hebrew texts.²⁷ Ram Ben-

²⁵ The definitive study of such philosophical polemics is Daniel J. Lasker, *Jewish Philosophical Polemics Against Christianity in the Middle Ages* (New York: Ktav Publishing House Inc., 1977). A valuable, and more recent, complement that focuses on the work of Joseph Kimhi, Jacob ben Reuben, David Kimhi, Rabbi Meir bar Simon, and Rabbi Moses ben Nahman, is Robert Chazan, *Fashioning Jewish Identity in Medieval Western Christendom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

²⁶ Kenneth Stow, *Jewish Dogs: An Image and Its Interpreters, Continuity in the Catholic-Jewish Encounter* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 23.

²⁷ Berger use of a similarly combative metaphor in the anonymous twelfth-century *Tractatus*

Shalom and David Berger argue that more informal theological discussion between Jews and Christians may have been a relatively common facet of Jewish and Christian neighbors' daily interaction. Ben-Shalom maintains that medieval polemic and debate between Jews and Christians was a much more complicated situation than the more lachrymose view would suggest. Though he cites evidence of Jewish caution about debating Christians without carefully considering one's opponents, Ben-Shalom argues that casual and informal inter-religious debate and discussion, at least in the Iberian context, spurred Jewish study of Christian philosophy and, more importantly, may have actually reduced social tension and violence.²⁸ Berger makes a point of emphasizing evidence of Jewish boldness in confronting Christians about matters of belief and doctrine in his critical edition of the *Nizzahon Vetus*, specifically mentioning Agobard of Lyons's ninth-century complaints about Jewish over-confidence and aggression, as well as similarly telling remarks from Walter of Châtillon, Louis IX, and others.²⁹

Indeed, Berger finds that until the high Middle Ages, Christians were surprisingly passive and uninterested in proselytism while most Christian polemical works were framed as responses to Jewish aggression.³⁰ Peter of Blois, for example, attributed his motivation for writing *Contra perfidiam Judeorum* to a request from a Christian who felt beset by questions from Jews and heretics. Peter claimed to be skeptical of any but modest gains among the Jews until their pre-ordained pre-apocalyptic conversion.³¹

Coupled with the seeming boldness of polemics like the *Nizzahon Yashan* and the *Yosef ha-Meqanne*, Berger concludes that Jews were indeed frequently the aggressors prior to the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.³² But others have been more reserved in their estimation. Frank Talmage was skeptical of claims like Berger's. He cites Solomon ben Moses de Rossi's thirteenth-century admonition

Adversus Judaeum, Berger, *The Jewish-Christian Debate*, 22. In an introductory passage, the author describes Jews as frequently ridiculing Christian ignorance and inviting would-be champions to enter "single combat," presumably meaning debate: "*Scribimus ergo non ut nostra laudentur, sed ne Judaeis risum nostrae imperitiae praebeamus, qui toties nobis insultant, et quodammodo cum Goliath dicunt: Eligite ex vobis unum qui ineat nobiscum singulare certamen*," *Tractatus Adversus Judaeum in Patrologia Latina: The Full Text Database* (Ann Arbor, MI: ProQuest Information and Learning Company, 1996), PL 213.749B. Available at http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?url_ver=Z39.88-2004&res_dat=xri:pdl-us&rft_dat=xri:pdl:ft:all:Z300077853 (last accessed on Jan. 17, 2010; requires log-in).

²⁸ Ram Ben-Shalom, "Between Official and Private Dispute: The Case of Christian Spain and Provence in the Late Middle Ages," *Association for Jewish Studies Review* 27 (2003): 23–72.

²⁹ Berger, *The Jewish-Christian Debate in the High Middle Ages*, 22.

³⁰ David Berger, "Mission to the Jews and Jewish-Christian Contacts in the Polemical Literature of the High Middle Ages," *The American Historical Review* 91 (1986): 576–91.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 580.

³² *Ibid.*, 588–89.

to Jews not to confront Christians.³³ Instead, he takes seriously the claims of Joseph Kimhi in the twelfth century, as well as those of his son David, when they said that their real targets were Jewish converts to Christianity (much as those converts frequently targeting Jews). Talmage suggests that on this basis, other polemicists likely had broadly similar goals.³⁴ On the other hand, Talmage's claim that "secure in their own faith, Jews had no compelling need to denigrate others" significantly discounts polemics like the *Nizzahon Vetus*.³⁵ Robert Chazan agrees, pointing out that despite the formal convention of addressing Christians, the limitations of Christian mastery of Hebrew and the danger of open defiance strongly suggest that the authors of Jewish polemics were writing primarily for other Jews.³⁶

Whether one is more persuaded by Berger on the one hand, or Talmage and Chazan on the other, the contemplation in the *Nizzahon Vetus* about good Jewish responses to Christian arguments necessarily makes it a comment on Jewish-Christian exchange and so pre-supposes dialogue. The text is addressed to Jews who might encounter Christians, rather than directly responding to Christians, and that is worth taking seriously. But the composition of the *Nizzahon Yashan* in Hebrew only partially protected it from Christian gaze. Thus the inclusion of materials that would have attracted Christian opprobrium required the good judgment of a would-be user as knowledgeable about Christian discourse as those responsible for the compilation of the text. By the end of the Middle Ages there were several prominent examples of Jewish-Christian disputations, and external pressure put such judgment to the test. The context of disputations and trials,

³³ Frank Talmage, "Christianity and the Jewish People," *Commentary* 59.2 (1975): 57–62.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 57.

³⁵ *Ibid.* After Talmage's article in *Commentary*, Berger and Talmage had a brief exchange in the letters to that publication. Berger objected to the comments cited here, specifically citing the *Yosef ha-Meqanne* and *Nizzahon Yashan*. Talmage responded by insisting on a distinction between making vituperative comments in a polemical text and engaging in actual debate, restating his insistence that polemical works such as the *Nizzahon Yashan* were aimed internally as a safeguard against apostasy; see David Berger, Frank Talmage, et al., "Letters from Readers," *Commentary* 59.6 (1975): 20–23.

³⁶ Robert Chazan, *Fashioning Jewish Identity*, 14–22; *id.*, *Barcelona and Beyond: The Disputation of 1263 and Its Aftermath* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992). Other scholars have shared the view that Jews and converts from Judaism were among the targets of Jewish anti-Christian polemic. Ora Limor and Israel Yuval have shown how R. Yom-Tov Lipmann Mühlhausen aimed his critique of Christianity at converts and heterodox Jews in his early fifteenth-century *Sefer ha-Nizzahon*, Ora Limor and Israel Yuval, "Skepticism and Conversion: Jews, Christians, and Doubters in *Sefer ha-Nizzahon*," in *Hebraica Veritas? Christian Hebraists and the Study of Judaism in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Allison P. Coudert and Jeffrey S. Shoulson (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 2004), 159–80. Hanne Trautner-Kromann has argued that the primary purpose of virtually all polemics, and the *Nizzahon Vetus* specifically, has been to discourage conversion to Christianity, rather than to attack Christianity directly, Hanne Trautner-Kromann, *Shield and Sword: Jewish Polemics against Christianity and the Christians in France and Spain from 1100–1500* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1993), 102.

which demanded defenses of Jewish thought and practice from figures like Nahmanides against the convert Pablo Christiani at the Barcelona disputation of 1263, compromised neat boundaries between public and private sentiments toward Christianity. Moreover, the constant threat of similar converts, such as Nicholas Donin, Petrus Alfonsi, or Abner of Burgos, who made accusations of anti-Christian statements in the Talmud or Jewish prayers meant that comments uttered or written behind the walls of Hebrew could never remain safely hidden. Indeed, they did not, with the *Toldot Yeshu* being mentioned in Christian writing as early as the ninth-century writings of Agobard of Lyons or the publication of a version of the story by Ramon Martini in his thirteenth-century *Pugio Fidei*. But even without such exposures, the *Nizzahon Vetus* suggests a much closer social connection between Jews and Christians—one which Jews might have had an interest in widening if it had enabled them to maintain their identities and prevent conversion.

A number of passages in the *Nizzahon Yashan* make clear the perceived need to reinforce boundaries. Many of them also exhibit a tendency to subvert the most cherished Christian doctrines, ironically by pretending to accept them as true. In one example, the *Sefer Nizzahon Yashan* portrays Jesus as a cosmic deceiver, foretold in the Bible as a threat to Jews or humanity more broadly. Commenting on the Fall in the Garden of Eden, the author of the *Sefer Nizzahon Yashan* goes on the offensive. Instead of framing his commentary as a response to a Christian, he poses his own question directly to the Christian community. Wondering why God would care if humanity lives forever, the author claims that God foresaw that Jesus would come one day and lead many astray through his claims of divinity. So, God ordained that it would be better to let human beings die so that Jesus could die, and thus his claims would be shown to be false.³⁷

A difference between humans and God was thus introduced as a means of disproving Jesus's future claims. For the purposes of this construction, the text accepts the Christian claim that the Bible exhibits foreknowledge of Jesus's life. But the *Nizzahon Vetus* inverts the claim, interpreting it not as a prophecy of hope but as a warning of impending danger. The threat is specifically named as Jesus's liability to draw people away from the righteous path to their detriment.³⁸

³⁷ *Sefer Nizzahon Yashan*, no. 9, in *The Jewish-Christian Debate*, 46 (English), 7 (Hebrew).

³⁸ David Biale has noted a similar sort of play on the relationship between Christ and anti-Christ in an apocalyptic counter-history called *Sefer Zerubavel*. The text has not been recognized as having any specifically anti-Christian content. However, Biale notices that Christian concepts of the Messiah inform not only the Jewish Messiah presented in *Sefer Zerubavel*, but also the invention of an "anti-Christ" figure to oppose the Jewish Messiah. According to Biale, the text should be read as denigrating the Christian messiah in the figure of Armilus as "anti-Meshiach" (using the Hebrew version of the English word "Messiah") but simultaneously exhibiting such profound influence from Christianity that the Jewish Messiah is depicted in Christ-like terms as well, David

Section 143 of the *Nizzahon Vetus* once again accuses Christians of over-reaching in their attempts to find prophecies of Jesus in the Hebrew Scriptures. The text points to a number of passages from Psalms that Christians have taken as prophecies of Jesus. But it counters with passages not just from the Psalms but from Deuteronomy, Numbers, Isaiah, and Jeremiah that could also be taken as prophecies of Jesus, offering the counter-interpretation that Jesus is prefigured in the Bible as a threat to humanity, rather than its savior:

“Accursed is the man who puts his trust in a man” [Jer. 17:5]. This is a reference to Jesus, for throughout the Gospels he is called son of man. Isaiah said, “the lofty looks of man shall be humbled . . . and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day” [Isa. 2:11], and the verse undoubtedly refers to Jesus, who exalted himself above all men and pretended to be God. David said, “Put not your trust in princes” [Ps. 116:3]—these are the apostles—“in the son of man, in whom there is no salvation” [ibid.]—this is Jesus, who is called the son of man. We see, then, that all the prophets contradict the story of Jesus (no. 143; English, 147–48; Hebrew, 91–93).³⁹

The *Nizzahon Yashan* downplays Christian exegesis as mere cleverness, claiming that someone who is ingenious and determined enough can find any meaning they please in Scripture. As the text explains, “any nation could explain the same words as a reference to its god” (no. 143; English, 147; Hebrew, 91–3)

One of these passages, Isaiah 2: 11, is used elsewhere as part of a more sustained discussion of this “Jesus prefigured” theme.⁴⁰ That section begins earlier in Isaiah with a passage indicating that in the last days the people of Jerusalem will go to the mountain of the Lord to hear again God’s law. Christians take this as a reference to the ultimate conversion of Jews to Christianity. The *Nizzahon Vetus* agrees that it refers to Jesus but argues that in that specific context it indicates that Jesus will be exposed as a false messiah on that day as well. The passage continues,

In the last days the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established, and then the lofty looks of man shall be humbled; i.e., Jesus, who exalted and raised himself above all men by claiming to be a god, will then be humbled, bowed down, and forgotten by all men together with the other gods of the nations. “In that day, the Lord shall be one and his name one” [Zech. 14:9]; i.e., no name of a foreign god shall be mentioned, not that of Jesus nor that of Muhammad but only that of the Lord, blessed be he (no. 80; English, 97–98; Hebrew, 52–54).

Biale, “Counter-History and Jewish Polemics Against Christianity: The *Sefer Toldot Yeshu* and the *Sefer Zerubavel*,” *Jewish Social Studies* 6 (1999): 130–41.

³⁹ Such passages support Amos Funkenstein’s observation that the *Nizzahon Yashan* is characterized by an unusual willingness to indulge in creative typological readings of the Biblical text that function by turning Christian typologies against their more conventional users; see Funkenstein, *Perceptions of Jewish History*, 117–118

⁴⁰ *Nizzahon Yashan*, no. 143, in *The Jewish-Christian Debate in the High Middle Ages*, 147–48 (English), 91–93 (Hebrew).

By widening the scope of the attack, the text suggests that Christianity is not particularly unique in threatening to lead people astray but symptomatic of another, larger problem that threatens believers. It thus also reminds us that Christians were neither the sole target nor immediate audience.

Demonstrations of faulty exegetical logic go on for several more sections, continuing the theme with passages taken from elsewhere in Isaiah, and extending the discussion to show the Bible's foreknowledge of the iniquities of Christians as well.⁴¹ After transitioning to some more straightforward critiques of Christian Biblical interpretation that seek to historicize and contextualize Christian claims, showing different references throughout Jewish history, the text makes its audience clear: "Now listen, men of understanding, and see how confused their words are and how they contradict the words of the living God. The book of Isaiah is, after all, in our possession . . ." (no. 81; English, 98–99; Hebrew, 54). Though the target of these attacks may be Christians, the work is not admonishing Christians for their unbelief but exhorting Jews not to be persuaded by Christian claims and reminding Jews that they have the knowledge to resist such statements.

The *Nizzahon Vetus* reinforces the unattractiveness of Christianity elsewhere in the text. It tells a story reminiscent of Judah ha-Levi's *Kuzari*, in which an unnamed emperor weighs the merit of several competing religions, including Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. In the version in the *Nizzahon*, the emperor threatens a Jew, a priest, and a Muslim with death if they do not convert to the faith of one of the others. All initially refuse, but both the priest and the Muslim consent to convert, choosing Judaism as the best of the alternatives.⁴² Only the Jew steadfastly refuses to convert, saying:

"Heaven forbid that I should leave my God, my creator and protector, who is the living God and eternal king, and cleave to a belief in a dead carcass. Know that for the Torah of our God, for the unity of our king and for the sanctification of the name of our creator I shall willingly suffer a thousand deaths and fulfill the verse, 'For your sake are we killed all day long' [Ps. 44: 23]. (no. 227; English, 216–17; Hebrew, 151–53).

Impressed by the strength of the Jew's faith, the emperor converts along with the priest and the Muslim. Christianity, as well as Islam, is made to look unattractive and the stalwart Jew is held up for emulation by the other characters and by the reader.

The book also engages the idea of conversion, suggesting that any converts to Judaism at all are more impressive than converts to Christianity. "The bad deeds of an evil Jew who becomes an apostate," after all, are readily understandable in light of the freedom from the commandments, access to forbidden foods, and

⁴¹ *Nizzahon Yashan*, no. 81, in *The Jewish-Christian Debate*, 98–99 (English), 54 (Hebrew).

⁴² *Nizzahon Yashan*, no. 227, in *The Jewish-Christian Debate*, 216–18 (English), 151–53 (Hebrew).

opportunities for self-indulgence that Christianity makes available.⁴³ Christians who convert to Judaism face taking on the yoke of the commandments and temporal slavery, physical danger, deprivation, exile from home, and, for men, the pains of circumcision. “And despite all this, they come to take refuge under the wing of the divine presence. It is evident that they would not do this unless they knew for certain that their faith is without foundation and that it is all a lie, vanity, and emptiness” (no. 211; English 206–07; Hebrew, 144–45).⁴⁴ The text describes the faith of the convert to Judaism, and by implication steadfast Jews who are not converts, as a kind of heroism to be admired. On the other hand, the Jew who trades God for comfort and ease by converting is described as contemptible.

Alexandra Cuffel’s *Gendering Disgust in Medieval Religious Polemic* is an important recent work on polemical exchanges among Jews, Christians, and Muslims.⁴⁵ Though the work is about disgust rather than polemical laughter, it sheds valuable insight on these issues. Cuffel examines a number of late antique and medieval works, arguing that Jews, Christians, and Muslims shared a common sense of an impure, gendered body that stood in the way of humanity’s contact with the divine. Polemicists from each religion were thus able to deploy feelings of disgust for this coarse corporeality against the others in their writings, in essence claiming that the bodies, practices, and ideas of one’s opponents were particularly offensive. Jewish objections to the Christian notion that God could be born of a woman is one area that provided much fodder for such polemical cultivation of disgust. Cuffel cites the twelfth-century Jewish writer Joseph Kimhi, who asked how it was possible to believe that the unknowable God could enter the “belly of a woman, the filthy (*mitunafim*) foul (*musrahim*) bowels [or ‘intestines’] of a female, compelling the living God to be born of a woman” to his obvious disgust.⁴⁶ The *Toldot Yeshu*’s claim that Jesus was born during the period of his mother’s menstrual impurity is another example of this phenomenon.⁴⁷ But not all examples of the polemic of disgust need be so vituperative. Cuffel draws a more subtle example from the *Nizzahon Vetus* itself, describing how the text claims that Christians acknowledge Mary’s own impurity by celebrating the day on which she

⁴³ *Nizzahon Yashan*, no. 211, in *The Jewish-Christian Debate*, 206 (English), 144–45 (Hebrew).

⁴⁴ The text repeats the notion that Christians know they are following a false religion and so are damned. Christians are asked why Friday is a day of fasting and repentance if it is truly the day of Christ’s redemptive sacrifice. The answer is that Christians “mourn because they know that all who believe in him will go down to hell, to a place of obstacles and stumbling,” *Nizzahon Yashan*, no. 226, in *The Jewish-Christian Debate*, 216 (English), 151 (Hebrew).

⁴⁵ See Albrecht Classen’s a review of Cuffel’s book, forthcoming in an issue of *Mediaevistik*.

⁴⁶ The bracketed alternate translation is also Cuffel’s, see her *Gendering Disgust*, 125.

⁴⁷ Cuffel, *Gendering Disgust*, 56–57.

brought her purifying sacrifice to the Temple as the Christian festival of "Lichtmess."⁴⁸

Cuffel argues that making the other disgusting reinforced barriers to social contact and heightened the sense of solidarity of a group.⁴⁹ But she subordinates her discussion of ridicule and derision to her over-arching interest in disgust. She makes little attempt to think through such acerbic humor as a separate analytical tool. Cuffel acknowledges the humorous element of her polemics of revulsion, as when she describes the *Sefer Nestor ha-Komer* playing upon the "unseemly humor" of "God-as-Jesus' messy, mewling infancy or heavenly farts."⁵⁰ Similarly she describes Berechiah ha-Naqdan's story of an ass donning a lion's skin and asserting his kingship over the animals as an "attempt to render Christians contemptuous because of their barnyard foolishness."⁵¹ However, terms like ridicule, mockery, and allied concepts serve as self-evident terms of description for various rhetorical strategies. But it is the shared conception of the body that makes such mockery possible, more than the ridicule itself, that is of interest to Cuffel.

Cuffel links her approach to James Scott's notion of the "hidden transcripts" of resistance circulating among oppressed.⁵² Scott claims that dominated groups frequently carry on a hushed but critical dialogue of resistance in which they express their resentment, aspirations for liberation, and disdain for dominant elites. These hidden transcripts generally occur safely out of earshot and behind walls of linguistic difference.⁵³ In referencing Scott, Cuffel suggests that the mockery of polemical works like the *Nizzahon Vetus* are clandestine moments of insurrection in which Jewish writers were able to undertake a silent attack upon their opponents through the medium of their shared notion of the gendered body, for which they held equal disdain.⁵⁴ Thus, the ridicule of the *Nizzahon Vetus* and other polemics might best be viewed as a private protest against the public discourse of alleged Jewish inferiority and Christian supersession.⁵⁵

⁴⁸ Indeed, as Cuffel notes, the text is sure to mention that the amount of the offering made is equivalent to the offering made in cases of leprosy, Cuffel, *Gendering Disgust*, 123–24.

⁴⁹ Cuffel, *Gendering Disgust*, 7–8.

⁵⁰ Cuffel, *Gendering Disgust*, 132.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 208.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 8.

⁵³ Scott also holds that elites maintain their own hidden transcript of discourse about those that they dominate, James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), xii. For Cuffel's own reference to the hidden transcript of elites, see Cuffel, *Gendering Disgust*, 248n.38. Scott's idea is a little more complicated insofar as he does offer some conditions under which hidden transcripts tend to emerge: one group's establishment over another of a "domain of public mastery and humiliation," "material appropriation," and a justifying ideology, see Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 111.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁵⁵ The related Christian ideas of supersessionism and the doctrine of the Jewish witness claim that

Cuffel's choice to bring Scott into the discussion allows her to point toward a useful perspective on the debate between Berger and Talmage over how explicit the aggression of Jewish polemics like the *Nizzahon Yashan* really was. But Scott's underlying theoretical commitments ultimately put his work at odds with Cuffel's own agenda and he overstates the subversiveness of ridicule from subordinates. As attractive as this view may be, it is only a partial answer to the problem of ridicule.⁵⁶

Scott's work has been criticized for importing a false dualism between a subordinate actor's disingenuous public self and his/her more sincere private feelings. Susan Gal has argued that Scott's provocative analysis is crippled by an outmoded view of the sovereign self which keeps dominant and subordinate parties distinctly separate and reduces the public actions of the subordinate to a dissembling act that conceals an autonomous self, impervious to the claims of the ruling elites. She argues that Scott's dualist notion of the subordinate self fails to see the way in which both sides of their persona are equally constructed by the same social processes or the kinds of subtle internalization of the dominant's views.⁵⁷

Gal's criticism is astute. Scott does often express his model in terms that keep the actions of the powerful and the powerless distinctly separate. This is not to say that Scott offers no hint of greater interaction. He does say that

the dialectical relationship between the public and hidden transcripts is obvious . . . The practice of domination, then, creates the hidden transcript. If the domination is

Christians had replaced Jews as the Chosen People and the "True Israel," relegating Judaism to a lingering position as obsolete preservers of the Scriptures as witnesses, in their defeat, to the triumph of Christianity. The ideas have precedents in the Gospels of Matthew and John and in the New Testament Letters to the Romans and Galatians, and were developed by such prominent Christian writers as John Chrysostom, Augustine of Hippo, and Isidore of Seville, as well as lesser-known figures such as the author of the Epistle of Barnabas and Melito of Sardis. Augustine is particularly important for developing the notion of Jews as witnesses to Christianity. These ideas were taken up by later thinkers including Anselm of Canterbury, Peter the Venerable, Thomas Aquinas, and Martin Luther, and polemicists like Petrus Alfonsi. See Chazan, *Daggers of the Faith*; Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law*; Funkenstein, *Perceptions of Jewish History*, 169–219; Franklin T. Harkins, "Unwitting Witnesses: Jews and Judaism in the Thought of Augustine," *Augustine and World Religions*, ed. Brian Brown, John Doody, and Kim Paffenroth (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2008), 37–70; Krauss, *The Jewish-Christian Controversy*; Marcel Simon, *Verus Israel: A Study of the Relations Between Christians and Jews in the Roman Empire (135–425)*, trans. H. McKeating (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 135–78.

⁵⁶ It is worth stressing that despite my reservations, I find a great deal of value in Scott's work. Clearly the nature of the "hidden transcript" is complicated and can contain both deliberate, strategic dissembling and subtle acceptance of the dominant ideology. For an example of Scott's perspective put to good use by another scholar, see Daniel Boyarin, *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), esp. 42–66.

⁵⁷ Susan Gal, "Language and the 'Arts of Resistance,'" *Cultural Anthropology* 10 (1995): 407–24.

particularly severe, it is likely to produce a hidden transcript of corresponding richness. The hidden transcript of subordinate groups, in turn, reacts back on the public transcript by engendering a subculture and by opposing its own variant form of social domination against that of the dominant elite. Both are realms of power and interests.⁵⁸

But whatever obvious dialectic Scott may think characterizes the relationship between the public and private discourses of the oppressed, Gal is correct in pointing out that Scott views “partners” in such relationship as distinct and separate parties. Scott frames their autonomy such that he can imagine the performances constituting the public transcript as masks hiding a more genuine self. While the “masks may get thicker or thinner, they may be crude or subtle, depending on the nature of the audience and the interests involved . . . they are nevertheless performances . . .”⁵⁹ Moreover, constant pressure to conform creates fantasies of revenge.⁶⁰ Though the dominant party can compel certain forms of outward behavior, the act of forcing obedience “virtually inoculates the complier against willing compliance.”⁶¹ Indeed, Scott explicitly opposes theories of hegemony that suggest that the power of the dominant is such that it can compel not only conformity but consent to that conformity through a kind of “false consciousness.”⁶²

However, Cuffel’s stated debt to the work of scholars like Ivan Marcus and Israel Yuval puts her at odds with Scott’s critique of such false consciousness.⁶³ Ivan Marcus has developed a notion of “inward acculturation” to describe Jewish responses to the tensions and conflicts that characterized the climate for Jewish-Christian coexistence in pre-modern Europe. He argues that over decades and centuries of interacting with Christians on their own terms, a certain degree of subtle influence infiltrated Jewish discourse and Jews absorbed elements of the culture of the dominant society. But in internalizing ideas, attitudes, and practices from their Christian neighbors, Jews typically transformed them, giving them an utterly new meaning—Judaizing them, as it were—and making them intrinsic parts of a uniquely Jewish life.⁶⁴

⁵⁸ James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 27.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 109.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 70–82.

⁶³ Cuffel, *Gendering Disgust*, 3–4, 15–17.

⁶⁴ Marcus, *Rituals of Childhood*, 1–13. It should be remembered that Amos Funkenstein described polemic as a valuable window on to the ways in which opposing cultures mutually constituted their boundaries and articulated their sense of self and other—defining the other was, for Funkenstein, essential to defining the self. Funkenstein, *Perceptions of Jewish History*, 170.

In *Rituals of Childhood: Jewish Acculturation in Medieval Europe*, Marcus reconstructs a medieval Jewish ritual for school children. In the ritual, a male child is initiated into the use of the Hebrew language and the study of the Torah by wrapping him in a prayer shawl, seating him upon his teacher's lap, and having him write Hebrew words and letters in honey. The child then consumes the honey, as well as cakes in the form of Hebrew letters. In this way, the community initiates the child into his engagement with the Word of God. Marcus identifies this as a polemical parody of Christian ritual and iconography—namely the Eucharist and images of the Madonna and Christ child—that contrasts those Christian notions with Jewish claims regarding more legitimate forms of identification with the embodiment of the Word of God and sources of spiritual nurturing.⁶⁵

Marcus's interpretation of the ritual places the impetus for these developments outside of the Jewish community that created it. It accepts Christian tropes involving the divine word, embodiment, and maternal images of nurturing as legitimate for Jewish religious expression, even as it attempts to give control over them to Jews and take it away from Christians. Because of Jews' and Christians' close proximity to each other and mutual interdependence, influence inevitably flowed from one community to the other and individuals were attracted to the rituals, texts, and ideas of their neighbors. Marcus argues that one occasion that indicates the result of this mutual interdependence is the actual outbreak of violence in the wake of the First Crusade. Liturgical poetry for use in the synagogue began to cast the victims of the Crusade—either those who were killed by Crusaders or those who committed suicide to avoid the Crusade—as martyrs. Such martyrs were lauded as sources of vicarious atonement reminiscent of Christian attitudes toward saints. Moreover, the notion of vicarious atonement has obvious resonance with Christ's atonement.⁶⁶ Rabbis especially figure as undeserved victims of persecution whose suffering has a redemptive quality consistent with that which Christians attribute to Christ. Marcus interprets this, in part, as a sign of the attraction that Christianity and the Christ-image had for some Jews. By identifying similar figures within a Jewish context, the attraction could be assimilated and turned toward Jewish ends, reinforcing traditional notions of Jewish piety rather than leading Jews away from the community.⁶⁷

Though he doesn't use the term, Israel Yuval's work on the relationship between Passover and Easter illustrates this pattern of inward acculturation rather effectively. Yuval locates the origin of both Easter and the modern Passover ritual in the end of Paschal sacrifices with the destruction of the Second Temple in 70

⁶⁵ Marcus, *Rituals of Childhood*, 18–34.

⁶⁶ Marcus, "A Jewish-Christian Symbiosis: The Culture of Early Ashkenaz," in *Cultures of the Jews: A New History*, ed. David Biale. (New York: Schocken Books, 2002), 463–70.

⁶⁷ Marcus, "A Jewish-Christian Symbiosis: The Culture of Early Ashkenaz," 493–96.

C.E. Christians, still in a process of distinguishing themselves from the Jewish community, and Jews both preserved the memory and significance of the Spring festival but did so in ways that served their own interests. While Christians reinterpreted the festival of deliverance by associating it with the narrative of Jesus's redemption of humanity from sin, Jews reinforced the traditional association of Passover and the Exodus story of Moses's liberation of the Hebrews from Egypt.

Yuval's innovation lies in claiming that the Jewish Passover Haggadah served not as an inspiration for Christian ritual, but arose in dialogue with, and even as a response to Christian practice. Much of the Christian "Passover" practice of Easter may actually precede corresponding Jewish practices. Furthermore, the story of Easter is also the story of the Mass. The sacrifice of Jesus for the redemption of humanity is communicated to Christians in the reception of the Eucharist. Both are a commemoration of the very Passover meal—the Last Supper—that allows for the Christian reinterpretation of Passover. Yuval's reading would make the Haggadah's opening—"This is the bread of affliction that our forefathers ate in the land of Egypt,"—a response to Jesus's words during the Last Supper—"This is my body which is given for you, do this in memory of me"—which also become the words of consecration in the Mass.⁶⁸ Thus, Yuval argues that a veiled polemical relationship has existed between these rituals from a very early stage in the mutual development of the two religions.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Israel J. Yuval, "Easter and Passover as Early Jewish-Christian Dialogue," in *Passover and Easter: Origin and History to Modern Times*, ed. Paul F. Bradshaw and Lawrence A. Hoffman (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999), 98–106. In a further parallel, the Haggadah includes the asking and answering of four questions meant to reinforce the significance of the holiday. Part of one of the answers stresses the requirement that the Seder not end with the ritual of the afikoman. Melito of Sardis, a second-century Christian writer, described the *afikoman* (using a questionable etymology that derives the word from the Greek *afikomenos* or "coming") as a symbol of the fulfillment of Jesus's coming as redemption. To end the Seder with the afikoman would be to blur the lines between the unleavened bread of Passover and the unleavened bread of the Eucharist; Yuval, "Easter and Passover as Early Jewish-Christian Dialogue," 107.

⁶⁹ According to Yuval, the subjugation of Jewish communities by Christians during the Middle Ages continued to impress the influence of Christian practice upon Jewish ritual, even as it freed Christians from direct Jewish influence. Confusion among Christians regarding Passover contributed to accusations of Jewish ritual murder by the thirteenth century. Yuval claims that some of the Christians' perception of Jewish animosity may derive from the entanglement of Passover practice with Easter and the Jewish desire to maintain a conceptual distinction between Judaism and Christianity. Christians confused the removal and destruction of leaven from Jewish homes in preparation for Passover with a symbolic destruction of the Eucharist and curse upon Christians—an accusation that figured in the events surrounding the composition of Yom-Tov Lipmann of Mühlhausen's fifteenth-century work, also titled *Nizzahon*, Israel J. Yuval, "Passover in the Middle Ages," in *Passover and Easter: Origin and History to Modern Times*, ed. Paul F. Bradshaw and Lawrence A. Hoffman (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999), 140–42. Displaying the unleavened matzah in the synagogue or on the walls of a Jewish home

Marcus's and Yuval's depictions of Jewish religious practice recover voices external to Judaism within Jewish culture itself. By responding to Christian claims, Jewish discourse bears the imprint of that process of interaction and conflict, retaining recoverable traces of the very discourse it was constructed to oppose. The anti-Christian polemics of medieval Jews does this quite openly. The ironic humor of the polemics frames Jewish claims against Christianity in the Christians' own terms, rhetorically adopting the Christian positions, even as they seek to undermine the Christian position.

Attention to Jewish polemical irony allows one to redraw the image of Jewish-Christian relations in medieval Europe as one of dynamic tension. Jews and Christians knew something of each other's lives, beliefs, and practices and were sometimes attracted to their neighbor's ways. Authorities had to remind their communities, whatever their religion, of the differences but could only do so by singling out elements of the other community that had to be avoided. The resulting view of such exchanges is reminiscent of the work of Mikhail Bakhtin's ideas on dialogue and his notion of "heteroglossia."⁷⁰

Bakhtin argued that self-understanding is impossible without dialogue. It must be mediated by the other's perception of self.⁷¹ Similarly, every statement is a reaction to statements that have gone before but it is also constrained by the choices made by the partner in dialogue.⁷² The end result, according to Bakhtin,

could easily be mistaken for a case of host desecration. Christian anti-Jewish claims were fueled by their misinterpretation of Jewish Passover practices, just as Jewish Passover practices after the destruction of the Second Temple were, in part, a response to Christian reinterpretation of that festival. Yuval, "Passover in the Middle Ages," 140–42. For a more comprehensive example of Yuval's approach, see Israel Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb: Perceptions of Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

⁷⁰ Mark Burde's contribution to this volume provides an important complement to my own. His criticism of scholars' assumptions regarding "sacred parody" in medieval literature mirrors my own wish to look at polemical mockery as conservative as well as rebellious. But my use of the target of his criticism—Bakhtin—complicates that affinity. I do not use the term "*parodia sacra*" in my essay and I briefly express criticism of Bakhtin's notion of the carnivalesque and its use by other scholars. But my own approach to Jewish-Christian polemic owes a broad debt to Bakhtin's concepts of dialogism and heteroglossia. I go on to associate those ideas with the work of Marcus, Yuval, and others that I endorse in this essay, including Cuffel's own work. Bakhtin's ideas are not so easily disentangled as I might like for them to be—all the more unfortunately as I acknowledge the value of Burde's critique and his greater understanding of Bakhtin's works. But I still think that Bakhtin's more general terms retain some value for describing certain kinds of quasi-dialectical relationships, even if his more specific historical and critical claims regarding *parodia sacra* are flawed and must be treated with caution. Despite his criticisms of Bakhtin, I think Burde's treatment of the problems and his concluding comments, leave room for such use.

⁷¹ Morris, *The Bakhtin Reader*, 5–7, 88, 250; Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 52–54, 184–86.

⁷² Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1981), 277–78; Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays* (Austin, TX: University of

is heteroglossia. Language conveys meaning through a multiplicity of voices brought to bear on any specific utterance. The historical context of the utterance, the speech forms or written genres that inform it, the specific subjects involved in the discourse, and a host of other contingent factors shape the dialogue in both centripetal and centrifugal ways—simultaneously building and destabilizing or reinterpreting the conventions of the dialogue.⁷³ Bakhtin offers a resolutely social form of textuality, doing away with the notion of a solitary author composing his text as the work of an autonomous, sovereign subject. Similarly, Yuval's Passover Haggadah, Marcus's initiation rituals and martyrology, and the scathing sarcasm of the polemics tie Jews and Christians together in a mutually constituting circle of derision and fascination.

And so the conflict between Scott's powerful articulation of the strategies of covert resistance available to the dominated and the more fluid interaction characteristic of the work of Marcus and Yuval quickly becomes apparent. For Marcus and Yuval, the shared elements of the public and hidden transcripts—or more descriptive of their positions, the discourses of the dominant and dominated—cannot be reduced to mere dissembling and strategic posturing. The shared conversation has its own unity and autonomy, making possible the statements on both sides of the relationship, whatever strategies of power are at work on either side. Scott acknowledges that such approaches would be more nuanced and viable than the picture of false consciousness that he associates with most theories of hegemony. But for Scott, positions like those of Marcus and Yuval would still be representative of a "thin hegemony." For Scott such compromises do at least recognize that the oppressed retain their resistance to the dominant ideology while nonetheless falling prey to the dominants' constriction of their imagination. But thin hegemonies still unduly reduce the inner autonomy of subordinates and so are ultimately unsatisfying solutions.⁷⁴

Despite Scott's decidedly un-dialogic orientation that contributes to an undisclosed tension in Cuffel's work due to her reliance on him, the Rabelaisian

Texas Press, 1986), 91–94; V. N. Voloshinov and M. M. Bakhtin, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, reproduced in Morris, *The Bakhtin Reader*, 56–61; Don Bialostosky, "Dialogic Criticism," *Contemporary Literary Theory*, ed. G. Douglas Atkins and Laura Morrow (Amherst, MA: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1989), 214–15; Michael Holmquist, "Glossary," Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 426–27; Morris, *The Bakhtin Reader*, 5, 8, 247; Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 49–56, 59–62, 130–33.

⁷³ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 262–64, 272–73; Holmquist, "Glossary," Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 425, 428; Morris, *The Bakhtin Reader*, 15–16, 73–74, 248–49; Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 139–45, 309–17.

⁷⁴ Scott exhibits some ambivalence toward "thin hegemony." While he rejects the idea of hegemony as a whole and the weight of his argument is squarely against any such view, he does concede that thin interpretations of this sort may have some value, Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 74–76.

side of Bakhtin's work is much more in evidence in Scott's approach. The relevance of carnivalesque inversions to medieval Jewish polemics against Christianity is readily apparent. How different are accusations that the Christian God-Man and messiah was a sorcerer, born of impurity, doomed to die between thieves and hanged on a cabbage stalk from "sermons in praise of thieves or . . . travesties of the catechism" by Christians of low status against those of high status and the institutions that bind them?⁷⁵ It is for this reason, and for the semi-secrecy and subversive aura of the polemics, that Cuffel seems content to offer Scott as her primary reference for understanding ridicule. Not only does he enumerate an impressive catalog of discursive tactics of resistance with his hidden transcripts, his comments on symbolic inversions links these strategies to a view of satire and parody that is widely known in disciplines beyond literary criticism.⁷⁶

Through Scott's eyes, the subversive nature of such inversions is all but certain. Ridiculing dominant social conventions and hierarchies by presenting their opposites for public amusement can't help but point out the arbitrary nature of reigning power structures.⁷⁷ Scott countenances criticism of his view—countering claims that the carnivalesque is merely a harmless release or a ritualized, imaginary substitute for real rebellion by emphasizing the efforts of governments and rulers to quash or limit such inversions. Scott concedes that in at least some cases, a "safety valve" interpretation of the carnivalesque as release and neutralization of tensions has some merits, but argues that to dwell on the official sanction alone is seriously reductionist.⁷⁸ To do so is to miss the fact that revelers

⁷⁵ Ibid., 174.

⁷⁶ Scott is not Cuffel's only reference for what theorizing of ridicule she does. Her primary references for disgust also have something to say about humor. Not surprisingly, Cuffel cites Mary Douglas's ideas about purity and danger to develop her ideas regarding the role of disgust in building hierarchy and social distinction. Cuffel, *Gendering Disgust*, 5, 50, 158, 240, 241. But Douglas has also written a famous essay on jokes, describing them as the opposite of rituals insofar as they are formalized symbolic forms that, unlike rituals, work to tear down or de-naturalize the social order, Mary Douglas, *Implicit Meanings: Essays in Anthropology* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), 90–114. Cuffel does not cite this essay but it is broadly consistent with Scott's understanding of the subversive import of mockery in the hidden transcript. Cuffel's views on disgust are also informed by William Ian Miller's *The Anatomy of Disgust*. Miller argues that disgust provides a means of locating others within the social hierarchy, allotting the disgusting places below the disgusted and boosting those making the judgment in the process; William Ian Miller, *The Anatomy of Disgust* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1997), x, 154, cited in Cuffel, *Gendering Disgust*, 6. As Miller develops his account of disgust, he frequently remarks on its proximity to both the comic and the contemptuous. The laughter of the contemptuous confirms the superiority of those in positions of privilege or, in cases of "upward contempt," undercuts the legitimacy of the privileged and asserts the value of those with lower status, Miller, *The Anatomy of Disgust*, 200–28. But as with Cuffel, the comic is not independently developed. It serves instead as a heuristic supplement to ideas of disgust and contempt.

⁷⁷ Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 168.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 177–78.

themselves have often cited the safety-valve theory in order to legitimize their excesses. Scott cites such an example from Bakhtin in a fifteenth-century Parisian case in which advocates of the Feast of Fools among the theology students justified their position as a necessary release of tension that prevented them from being overwhelmed by their studies, much as one might periodically air out wine barrels to prevent the vessels from bursting from overuse.⁷⁹

But Scott also criticizes Bakhtin's approach to the carnivalesque as reducing it to spontaneously open moments of free expression—a view he identifies with Habermas's notion of the "ideal speech situation."⁸⁰ Scott argues that the views of both Bakhtin and Habermas underestimate the degree of political motivation and calculation in such inversions.⁸¹ Bakhtin's aforementioned example arguably describes a mere justification—a deliberate ruse meant to satisfy the authorities and create a safe space for carnival ritual that might have had more important meanings for other revelers. Rather than as episodes of momentary liberation from oppressive regimes, Scott sees them as intentional reactions that present a model of revolt in ordinary times and offer cover for actual revolt in extraordinary circumstances.⁸²

Scott's criticism points out an important methodological aspect of his approach. Because, for Scott contra Bakhtin, the liberatory excesses of the carnivalesque are never entirely free from the contextual conflicts that give rise to them; any eruption of the hidden transcript into public discourse is necessarily compromised by subordinates' dissembling meant to protect the hidden transcript as a whole.⁸³ An outside reader can never be entirely certain what the author meant because it may well have been produced under a deliberate strategy of deception. Feelings of resentment and rebellion are deliberately cloaked in elements of the public transcript in order to veil a clandestine discourse of resistance and testify to the savviness of subordinates in creating cultural productions that re-contextualize and redeploy their intended significance.⁸⁴ These "trickster tales," as Scott dubs them, bear a certain resemblance to the sorts of hybrid creations that Marcus sees as evidence of internal acculturation. They are no doubt part of the reason that Cuffel finds Scott's approach congenial to Marcus's notion of inward acculturation. But there remains an important difference insofar as inward acculturation, unlike the trickster tales, refers to a process wherein elements of the dominant culture are

⁷⁹ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 75, cited in Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 178.

⁸⁰ Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 176.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid., 178–79.

⁸³ Ibid., 92.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 19, 162–66.

assimilated, transformed, and merged into the culture of the subordinate, not merely used as a cloak to hide non-elite culture.⁸⁵

Scott's larger point that one needs to read culture against the grain is valid. And yet, his invocation of the multivalent nature of ridicule and the constant potential for our evidence to be compromised cuts both ways. Just because polemical laughter has a subversive quality does not mean that it works only in that way just as an observation that ridicule may work to preserve the status quo cannot foreclose the possibility of it also having revolutionary implications. To neglect either side of the complicated meanings of such ridicule is to diminish it.⁸⁶

The point is better made by returning to the *Nizzahon Vetus*, which is arguably a more deeply hidden transcript than public Christian carnival rituals. In a famous passage, the Jewish speaker seems to have accepted Christian claims that Jews were ugly in comparison to Christians: "The heretics ask: Why are most Gentiles fair-skinned and handsome while most Jews are dark and ugly?" The *Nizzahon* recommends a comparison to fruit as an answer. Some fruits begin light colored and darken as they ripen, like plums, while others, like apricots, begin red and turn lighter. The *Nizzahon* then extrapolates that since Jews are light in their origin and Gentiles start red, that Gentiles are born contaminated by menstrual impurity whereas Jews are not.⁸⁷ Instead of denying the disparaging characterization of Jews' appearance, or openly denouncing Christians' smug sense of superiority, the *Nizzahon* points to Jews' lack of a particular source of impurity as more than satisfactory compensation. The *Nizzahon* further accepts the Christian claim by offering an alternative response, claiming that Christian beauty is a reflection of their lack of self control and fondness for images: "One can respond further by noting that Gentiles are incontinent and have sexual relations during the day, at a time when they see the faces on attractive pictures; therefore, they give birth to children who look like those pictures, as it is written, 'And the sheep conceived when they came to drink before the rods' (Gen. 30: 38–39)."⁸⁸

Although the text takes the accusation of ugliness as an opportunity to launch its own attack at Christians, it does not challenge the initial charge, indicating a certain acceptance of the bodily aesthetic espoused by Christians.⁸⁹ One would presume that an attack safely concealed within the hidden transcript would be

⁸⁵ Marcus, *Rituals of Childhood*, 11–12.

⁸⁶ Albrecht Classen's introduction to this volume provides an extensive overview of humor and laughter in pre-modern European art and literature as well as modern theoretical engagement with those and related concepts. Classen uses the variety of views and sources presented to show quite clearly the complexity of these issues and the danger of reductionism.

⁸⁷ *Nizzahon Yashan*, no. 238, in *The Jewish-Christian Debate*, 224 (English), 159 (Hebrew).

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ The lack of a refutation has been noted by many authors. Berger mentions it in his commentary on the passage, *ibid.*, 340.

able to reject openly the offending view of the body or thrust it directly back at the offender, claiming that the accusers were the truly ugly ones, not members of one's own group. One could argue that the author hesitates, fearing the consequences of his denial of Christian beauty being made public, and so chooses another route. But the *Nizzahon Vetus* is presented as a manual for public debate. Moreover, the attack of ritual impurity in this passage, and the much more incendiary comments elsewhere in the *Nizzahon* belie such hesitation. The redactor of the text does not seem to be a consistent self-censor and it is hard to believe that excretory punning on the name of Mary meets muster but that calling Christians ugly does not. Instead, this polemical transcript makes no clear distinction between the Jewish and Christian views (and the same can be said of Cuffel's examples of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim disgust). Christians are still setting the terms of the discussion, even as Jews attack Christian claims.

Michael Billig's recent effort to develop a "social critique of humor" points out the conservative side of even rebellious ridicule.⁹⁰ Billig is reluctant to rush to an emancipatory interpretation of ridicule due to his concerns about the unambiguously positive understanding of humor that pervades our culture. Positioning himself against what he calls the "ideological positivism" of those who see laughter as fundamentally good, Billig wants to remind his readers of the biting and aggressive qualities of humor, particularly in its ability to compel compliance from others. But Billig maintains that such aggression is just as often directed inwardly, demanding conformity, as it is subversive or radical.

If humor's primary social function lies in the use of ridicule and embarrassment to enforce social expectations, such radical possibilities cannot be taken for granted. Bakhtin's notion that "laughter only unites" must then be qualified by acknowledging "the closed, purely negative, satirical laugh."⁹¹ Laughter must, at the very least, have the possibility of acting in favor of either conformity or rebellion, if it is to serve the purposes of rebellion at all. Billig takes up the apparent distinction between humor that disciplines and rebellious humor, but he argues that the differences actually are not terribly obvious. Citing Anton Zijderveld and Hans Speier, he claims that apparently critical humor can actually have the opposite effect. Zijderveld's study of the goliards indicated that their anti-clerical mockery cannot be seen as a protest against the institution of clergy itself, to which they often belonged. Rather, it was a critique of the behavior of certain clergy that ultimately served to demonstrate the extent of authorities' power despite their unworthiness. And so, while it was characterized by an attitude of

⁹⁰ The quote comes from the subtitle of Billig's book, Michael Billig, *Laughter and Ridicule: Towards a Social Critique of Humour* (London: SAGE Publications, 2005).

⁹¹ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays* (Austin: University of Texas), 135; cited in Billig, *Laughter and Ridicule*, 201.

rebelliousness, the goliards' humor had no subversive effects.⁹² Similarly, Billig cites Speiers's comments on the whispered jokes that circulate through areas held by repressive regimes. Such laughter may indicate a hidden transcript of dissatisfaction with prevailing power relationships, to borrow Scott's terms, but are not of themselves an effective means of resistance. Indeed, humor of this sort can impede actual resistance, according to Speier, when it becomes a subversion-flavored tonic to help one swallow one's own acquiescence to, and accommodation of, those power relations.⁹³

Far from the suspicious stand Billig, Zijderveld, and Speier take toward humor, Cuffel and Scott assume a natural fit between such expressions of humor and dissident, critical voices. They do not set out with the specific intent of theorizing ridicule, mockery, satire, parody, or other forms of socially aggressive laughter. Rather, they merely fold them into the range of private, subversive discourses that make up Scott's hidden transcripts. The assumption that laughter which appears to be radical in its intention is subversive in its effects—or more precisely that it subverts the position of its ostensible target—simplifies the potential for deeply complicated exchanges between the Jews and Christian of pre-modern Europe.

Instead, Billig develops a theory of the more conservative social functions of humor, building on Bergson and Goffman, among others, to locate those functions in the disciplining use of ridicule and embarrassment to communicate and to enforce behavioral norms. Using research from developmental psychologists as his example, Billig cites parents' laughter at the mistakes of young children as an example of the ways in which humor and ridicule are used to identify and prevent undesirable behavior through fear of embarrassment. For example, he cites the work of Judith Dunn who observed parents instructing children in normal expectations about the social and natural worlds by identifying various incongruities between expectation and reality as funny as well as similar research from Kathy Johnson and Carolyn Marvis showing how a particular child learned about proper speech patterns from the laughter that greeted his or her mistakes and his or her subsequent use of deliberate transgressions to provoke further laughter as specific forms of correctives.⁹⁴

⁹² Anton C. Zijderveld, *Reality in a Looking Glass: Rationality through an Analysis of Traditional Folly* (London: Routledge Kegan and Paul, 1982), cited in Billig, *Laughter and Ridicule*, 212–13.

⁹³ Hans Speier, "Wit and Politics: An Essay on Laughter and Power," *The American Journal of Sociology* 103 (1998), 1352–401; cited in Billig, *Laughter and Ridicule*, 213. While Speier is aware of the conservative and disciplining nature of humor, the essay as a whole is not uniformly suspicious, acknowledging, for example, humor's contrary ability to serve as an effective political weapon as well as its soothing and healing capacities, Speier, "Wit and Politics," 1354–59.

⁹⁴ In Dunn's example, an inappropriately dressed child informs her mother that her father is responsible for dressing her. The mother labels the father as "silly old Daddy," evoking laughter from the child; Judith Dunn, *The Beginnings of Social Understanding* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), 158;

Setting aside the question of whether Billig's observations about childrearing techniques can withstand cross-cultural and historical scrutiny, it does point to a theory of humor that offers ridicule and subsequent embarrassment a role in processes of social disciplining.⁹⁵ In the cases Billig cites from Dunn and from Johnson and Marvis, parents' gentle mockery points out the consequences of inappropriate behavior by subjecting children to their parents' laughter or by associating the behavior with a third party at which children are invited to laugh also. A similar maneuver happens in the *Nizzahon Yashan*.

The passage that opened this paper offers an example of conservative implications coexisting with outwardly radical attacks on Christianity in the *Nizzahon*. In that passage Jesus is rebuked at the Crucifixion and allowed to die because of his failure to help God during Creation. The passage mocks Christian over-interpretation of God's use of the first person plural in Genesis. After suggesting the simpler explanation that it is merely due to God's tendency to use the Royal "We," the *Nizzahon Vetus* goes on to play with that very Christian excess in its own mock-interpretation of the Crucifixion as the backfiring result of the refusal to assist in the creation of human beings by the presumably divine Jesus. A rather straightforward interpretation of the language of Genesis is put forward followed by an absurdly paternalistic story that makes Christian interpretation of the Bible appear over-reaching and silly. Because Jews were not ordinarily in a position to make such open mockery of Christian claims, the patronizing response in the *Nizzahon* hints at the same notions of the carnivalesque ridicule that Scott had discussed. Politically dominant Christianity is reduced to childlike dependence on guidance from the subaltern Jewish community.

But though the Christian view is labeled as silly, the child in need of correction may well not be Christian, but Jewish. Arguably, the real audience for such mockery contained within the closed confines of clandestine Hebrew texts consisted of Jews tempted to convert, and those who had already done so, rather than the Christians exerting the pressure to convert. An uncertain Jewish community is invited to laugh at the silliness of Christian interpretation and so discouraged from following suit the other converts, while those who had accepted

and Kathy Johnson and Carolyn Marvis, "First Steps in the Emergence of Verbal Humour: a Case Study," *Infant Behavior and Development* 20 (1997): 187–96; both cited in Michael Billig, *Laughter and Ridicule*, 183.

⁹⁵ Billig's argument suggests that the origins of laughter's social functions lie in the disciplining laughter of adults. The problem, though, is that this requires a universality of childrearing techniques that would be difficult to prove. Billig addresses the issue by briefly pointing to a number of anthropological studies that indicate the use of laughter and ridicule to discipline children in Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, among Mexican immigrants in California, in Japan, and among American working class families, Billig, *Laughter and Ridicule*, 198.

baptism are given reasons for regret. Ridicule by the marginalized is not simply a utopian protest against the dominant group's regime of discipline, although it no doubt contains an element of such protest. Rather, mockery from the margins can also reflect social disciplining by the disciplined. The assumption that polemical laughter *only* and automatically signifies a conscious and aggressive reaction to the dominant other fails to account for the complexity and subtlety of relations between dominants and subordinates.

In such an interpretation, Jewish counter-narratives of Jesus's life, mockery of Christian exegesis, and willingness to wryly play with the notion of Jesus as the Son of God come to look like defensive maneuvers meant to make crossing religious and cultural boundaries look foolish. Ironically, the effect of such strategies was to help keep Jews within the domains partly circumscribed by Christians themselves. To be sure, this is still a mode of resistance contributing to the preservation of Jewish identities and a testimony to the strength and flexibility of those identities. But such preservation of boundaries and identities can hardly be reduced to mere rebellion and protest. Rather it requires a more subtle view of conflict and coexistence that fits better with Cuffel's stated objective of showing how Jews and Christians, as well as Muslims, used fundamentally the same techniques in their polemical exchanges. The common perspective unwittingly uniting all three groups must be preserved if it is to retain its usefulness as a polemical device.

In their respective polemical efforts, Jewish and Christian representations and fears of the other became imbricated together into a tightly woven knot of claims and counter-claims. Christians feared that the influence of Jews within the Christian community would tempt Christians into "Judaizing" heresy and so turned apostate Jews against Jewish communities, deploying their knowledge of Jewish texts to castigate the minority faith for its alleged blasphemous ridicule of Christianity. Jews reacted to the threat of proselytization, among other more physical threats, by doing exactly that—ridiculing Christianity, though on a much smaller and more controlled scale than Christians claimed. In their polemics, Jews recast Christian ideas as parodies of themselves. Medieval Jewish-Christian controversy then was a quasi-dialectical process in which thesis and antithesis revolved around each other constantly deferring any ultimate synthesis just as actual Jews and Christians lived uneasily together, bound in part by conflicting interpretations of their common Biblical heritage.

Chapter 9

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Laughing at the Beast: The *Judensau*: Anti-Jewish Propaganda and Humor from the Middle Ages to the Early Modern Period

Around 1900, the visitors of a fair in Saxony might have come across a traveling theater that was performing there, and if they stayed for the afterpiece, they might have been entertained with a puppet that is now kept at the Municipal Museum in Munich: a pig that, whenever the strings are pulled, is turned into a *Schacherjude*, the 'classical' figure of a bearded Jew, bearing all the stereotyped facial features and extending a hand in a gesture that should evoke the idea of haggling, of reaching out for money. The swift transformations from sow to Jew to sow, enabled by a tilting mechanism, must have left a deep impression on the spectators who saw the two images blurring into one right in front of their eyes.¹ Although this device is in its simplicity a far cry from the complex and sophisticated medieval and early modern *Judensau* icons and shares nothing but the most basic features with them, it must have brought to mind to spectators the very image of the *Judensau* and further cemented a connection that lay at the basis of probably the most successful anti-Jewish image in the German speaking realm: the Jew *per se* is equal to a sow, and therefore barely, if at all, human. Therefore it is absolutely justified, even inevitable, to laugh at him; he deserves no better.

The oldest example of a *Judensau* that is still in existence, although badly weathered, is dated to about 1230 and located in the Cathedral of Brandenburg an

¹ Stefan Rohrbacher and Michael Schmidt, *Judenbilder: Kulturgeschichte antijüdischer Mythen und antisemitischer Vorurteile* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1991), 28–31, with illustration. I would like to express my gratitude to Albrecht Classen and Jean N. Goodrich for their valuable comments and corrections of the whole article.

der Havel (northeastern Germany, between Magdeburg and Berlin), where it forms the capital of a column in the cloister of the Cathedral. While the main features of the typical *Judensau* are present in this relief—the sow, the suckling, and the Jewish hat—it differs from the later pieces due to the beast-human hybrid character that the sow and one piglet display: both feature a human head (with the sow wearing a hat that resembles the typical pointed Jewish hat²) and a human arm instead of one of their legs. This composition is therefore reflecting the quite common subject of beast-human hybrid figures of medieval art in general,³ yet it is not an ‘ordinary’ human whose head is placed on the animal’s body, and whose offspring is suckling her teats, but clearly a Jew. In addition to that, there are two human figures flanking the sow: a woman in front of the sow seems to be feeding it while a man wearing a long coat is crouching behind the animal and reaching toward its backside, a scene at least foreshadowing the later common composition of a man caressing the sow’s anus.

These two activities of the Jews, the suckling of the sow’s teats and the occupation with the animal’s hindquarters, turned out to become the key features of the *Judensau* that were repeated in almost all of its renditions, even if the composition of the figures differed in their setup. The other (still existing) early- to mid-thirteenth-century *Judensäue* too vary profoundly from what would eventually emerge as the ‘classic’ type. The *Judensau* of St. Mary’s at Lemgo (southwest of Hanover) from around 1310 features a kneeling man wearing a Jewish hat who is embracing and (probably) kissing a sow. In the Cathedral of Xanten, an ensemble consisting of a sow, a Jew, and a little hybrid monster are depicted on a corbel in the north side of the choir; the Jew, recognizable as such with his Jewish hat, side-locks and chin-beard, is half-kneeling, his head turned toward the beholder, while the sow is biting into the pointed end of his hat. The

² The question whether the pointed hat was an exclusively derogatory sign, as suggested by Ruth Mellinkoff, *Outcasts: Signs of Otherness in Northern European Art of the Later Middle Ages*, vol. 1: *Text*. California Studies in the History of Art, 32 (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and Oxford: University of California Press, 1993), 91–94, or whether it was (originally) part of the Jewish costume, is still ongoing, see recently Sara Lipton, *Images of Intolerance: the Representation of Jews and Judaism in the Bible moralisée* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: California University Press, 1999), 15–19; Debra Higgs Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, & Jews: Making Monsters in Medieval Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 105–07; Michael Toch, *Die Juden im mittelalterlichen Reich*. Second ed. Enzyklopädie deutscher Geschichte, 44 (1998; Munich: Oldenbourg, 2003), 37–38; Jacqueline E. Jung, “The Passion, the Jews, and the Crisis of the Individual on the Naumburg West Choir Screen,” *Beyond the Yellow Badge: Anti-Judaism and Antisemitism in Medieval and Early Modern Visual Culture*, ed. Mitchell B. Merback (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 145–77; here 150–52; and Ziva Amishai-Maisels, “Demonization of the ‘Other’ in the Visual Arts,” *Demonizing the Other: Antisemitism, Racism, & Xenophobia*, ed. Robert S. Wistrich (1999; London: Routledge, 2003); 44–72; here 56.

³ Joyce E. Salisbury, *The Beast Within: Animals in the Middle Ages* (New York and London: Routledge, 1994), 137–66.

tiny monster, interpretable as a Jew⁴ with side-locks and a hat and nothing but a trefoil leaf covering its buttocks, suckles the sow's teats. The sow-kissing Jew in the nave of Mary Magdalene's church in Eberswalde (northeast of Berlin), and the Jew who is pushing away one of the piglets that are suckling a sow's teats in a church in Bad Wimpfen (north of Stuttgart) are further examples of the variations of yet one and the same topic.⁵

One of the main questions remains why the *Judensau* developed primarily in the German speaking regions. Isaiah Shachar sees different readings and interpretation of Biblical texts, an aligning of the swine with the Jews in Hrabanus Maurus' *De universo*, at the origin of the development, contrasting the German tradition with the English that is remarkably void of the Jew-sow motif, in spite of the quite numerous examples of sows, often with suckling piglets, in English churches and monasteries as well as in manuscripts of bestiaries. Both traditions share the idea of the filthiness of the swine,⁶ utilizing the animal to symbolize impurity, thus also serving as a symbol for heretics, and the vices of *luxuria* and *gula*,⁷ yet the sow-with-piglets seems to be a distinctive feature of the English manuscript illustration. Recently, Israel Yuval has launched the appealing theory

⁴ Isaiah Shachar, *The Judensau: A Medieval Anti-Jewish Motif and Its History*. Warburg Institute Surveys, 5 (London: Warburg Institute, 1974), 17: piglet-Jew, while Heinz Schreckenberger, *Christliche Adversus-Judaos-Bilder: Das Alte und Neue Testament im Spiegel der christlichen Kunst*. Europäische Hochschulschriften. Series XXIII: Theologie, 650 (Frankfurt a. M., Berlin, Bern, et al.: Peter Lang, 1999), 189, interprets it as a little monkey. On monkeys/apes as a signifier of evil, see Mariko Miyazaki, "Misericord Owls and Medieval Anti-Semitism," *The Mark of the Beast: The Medieval Bestiary in Art, Life, and Literature*, ed. Debra Hassig. Garland reference library of the humanities, 2076; Garland medieval casebooks, 22. (New York and London: Garland, 1999), 23–52; here 33–34, who establishes a specific connection between owls and apes. See also the contribution to this volume by Christine Bousquet-Labouërie.

⁵ Shachar, *Judensau*, 16–19, pl. 7–12. Recently, the sculpture in Bad Wimpfen (gargoyle) has been replaced by a replica while the original has been moved to the municipal museum.

⁶ Alexandra Cuffel, *Gendering Disgust in Medieval Religious Polemic* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), 40–45, explores the classical and late antique roots of the image(s) both the Jewish and Christian Middle Ages had of the pig.

⁷ Shachar, *Judensau*, 5; see also Wilfried Schouwink, *Der wilde Eber in Gottes Weinberg: Zur Darstellung des Schweins in Literatur und Kunst des Mittelalters* (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1985), 83–85. For the connection of Jews with *gula/luxuria*-usury, see Winfried Frey, "Der 'Wucherjude' als Karikatur christlicher Praxis," *Das Mittelalter: Perspektiven mediävistischer Forschung*, vol. 10, part 2: *Produktive Kulturkonflikte*, ed. Felicitas Schmieder (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 2005): 126–35; here 128; Johannes Heil, "Das Geld und das Gold des Kalbes: Momente der Exodusdeutung zwischen Patristik und Neuzeit," *Shylock? Zinsverbot und Geldverleih in jüdischer und christlicher Tradition*, ed. id. and Bernd Wacker (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1997), 35–58. See also the summary by Johannes Fried, "Zins als Wucher: Zu den gesellschaftlichen Rahmenbedingungen der Predigt gegen den Wucherzins," Introduction to the newly revised German edition of Jacques LeGoff, *Wucherzins und Höllenqual: Ökonomie und Religion im Mittelalter*, trans. from the French by Matthias Rüb (1986; Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2008), 134–74.

that the *Judensau* motif derived from the vilification of the Messianic donkey, that it is, in fact, its satiric opposite.⁸

The early types, as much as they differ from what is to become the 'classical' *Judensau*, nevertheless give not only evidence of the quite wide-ranging distribution of the general image of sow-with-Jew but share characteristic traits that make them predecessors of the later derogatory image. Be it the dehumanizing of the Jew by using the hybrid forms in the Brandenburg and Xanten examples, the sow-kissing Jew of Eberswalde with its allusion to the sodomitic proclivities of the sexually deviant Jew,⁹ its emphasis is on the Jews' beastly, non-human descent, similar to other beast-Jew hybrids like the one that adorns the corbel of a column in the cloisters of the Carmelite monastery in Bamberg (see figure 1). The oldest depiction that shows all the main features which in the centuries to come would add up to the 'classical' image of the *Judensau* is probably the one at the Cathedral of Magdeburg from the last third of the thirteenth century, a carved frieze on the wall of the (former) atrium, thus visible to all upon entering the church. The frieze is badly damaged today, yet the main characteristics are clearly discernible: on two sides of a corbel, a huge sow is depicted with its head reaching around the corner, and a Jew wearing a long frock-coat, a conical hat, long hair and beard is standing behind her while a second Jew, similarly attired, is kneeling beneath the sow, holding and suckling one of her teats. Due to the damage, we cannot determine fully whether the Jew standing behind the sow is reaching toward her anus since his arms have broken off; also the heads of the two piglets, one sitting under the sow's belly, the other standing beneath her head, are missing. On the other side of the corbel, in front of the sow, a woman is picking an acorn from a tree while holding a bowl, behind her, a Jew is depicted holding an open scroll.¹⁰

None of the thirteenth-century *Judensäue* stands alone. In Brandenburg an der Havel and Xanten, the *Judensau* images are contrasted with battle scenes between representations of evil. In Brandenburg, dragons are fighting knights or mangling their already dead bodies, while at Xanten, the encounter of the evil forces — fighting dragons on the one and the *Judensau* on the other corbel — is contrasted by the holy scene that is going on above, in the scene the sculptures standing on the two corbels represent: the Visitation scene, the meeting of Mary and

⁸ Israel Jacob Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb: Perceptions of Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, trans. from the Hebrew by Barbara Harshav and Jonathan Chipman (2000; Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2006), 127–29.

⁹ The idea of the sexually insatiable Jew has already been introduced by antique writers, including Tacitus, see Jan Nicolaas Sevenster, *The Roots of Pagan Anti-Semitism in the Ancient World* (Leiden: Brill, 1975), 142.

¹⁰ Shachar, *Judensau*, 19–20, pl. 13–14.

Elizabeth.¹¹ The *Judensau* at Magdeburg is part of an elaborate cycle that Isaiah Shachar interprets as a series of vices that are portrayed by usage of human-animal pairings: a naked girl, with a ram and apes as the allegorization of *luxuria* whereas the sow and the Jews are representing *gula*, gluttony. Twelfth-century bestiaires give a hint as to what the sow stands for in medieval iconographical context:¹² a representation of slack penitents, of sinners who return to their sin, reflecting the words of St. Peter that “the dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire” (2 Peter 2:22), which is considered an even greater sin than just sinning once, because it means despising the forgiveness that was granted to the sinner due to his, or her, repentance. This passage also established the equation of Jews with both swine and dogs by Christian polemics, particularly from the eleventh century onwards;¹³ a more widespread adaptation was triggered by the allusion in the *Decretum Gratiani* that, referring to the council of Agde from 506 C.E., declared that Jews who considered baptism should remain catechumens for eight months since they “tend to return to their vomit because of their perfidy.”¹⁴ The swine, an animal already linked to leprosy and skin diseases by authors like Plutarch¹⁵ and further stigmatized by the Bible as standing for unclean, sinful people, negligent penitents and heretics as well as being associated with luxury and gluttony, therefore was the ‘ideal’ beast to be connected with Jews: it was the Jews that often served as representatives of unwanted Christian behavior, pairings of Jews and heretics had become, according to Lipton,

¹¹ Shachar, *Judensau*, 17.

¹² Sarah Phillips, “The pig in medieval iconography,” *Pigs and Humans: 10.000 Years of Interaction*, ed. Umberto Albarella, Keith Dobney, Anton Erynck, and Peter Rowley-Conwy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 373–87; here 374–76.

¹³ Winfried Frey, “‘Wlt Gott man hing sie wie die Hund’. Vergleiche von Juden mit Hunden in deutschen Texten des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit,” *Das Mittelalter: Perspektiven mediävistischer Forschung*, vol. 12, part 2: *Tier und Religion*, ed. Thomas Honegger and W. Günther Rohr (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 2007), 119–34; here 121; see also Kenneth Stow, *Jewish Dogs: An Image and Its Interpreters. Continuity in the Catholic-Jewish Encounter*. Stanford Studies in Jewish History and Culture (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), and Ivan G. Marcus, “Images of the Jews in the Exempla of Caesarius of Heisterbach,” *From Witness to Witchcraft: Jews and Judaism in Medieval Christian Thought*, ed. Jeremy Cohen. Wolfenbütteler Mittelalter Studien, vol. 11 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1996), 247–55; here 250–51, who points out that the dog image is used by Christians and Jews alike.

¹⁴ Heinz Schreckenberger, *Die christlichen Adversus-Judaeos-Texte (11.–13. Jahrhundert): Mit einer Ikonographie des Judenthemas bis zum 4. Laterankonzil*. Europäische Hochschulschriften. Sec. ed. Reihe XXIII: Theologie, 335 (1988; Frankfurt a. M., Bern, New York, et al.: Peter Lang, 1991), 151. Frey, “Vergleiche von Juden mit Hunden,” 122, points out that this literary image was also used as an argument for the (financial) support of newly baptised Christians lest they are forced to return to their old religion like a dog to its vomit.

¹⁵ Sevenster, *The Roots of Pagan Anti-Semitism*, 137–38.

commonplace by the thirteenth century.¹⁶ Jews were closely connected with the sins of greed and excessive luxury, and there is but little doubt that Christians were aware of the Jewish ritual regulations that marked the swine as unclean, adding yet another layer of insult to the equation.¹⁷

Yet as much as these interpretations fit with the medieval usage of animal symbolism, it is, however, crucial, as Alexandra Cuffel has pointed out, to seek for other animals or iconography in the surroundings of the *Judensau* image that may not be part of the cycles of vices but provide an additional connection to Jews, thus allowing anti-Jewish polemics to appear repeatedly in many churches of medieval Christendom, even if these are not placed in the foreground.¹⁸ As much as treating any artistic denigration of Jews as primarily, even exclusively, anti-Jewish propaganda would reduce the complexity of medieval metaphorical and pictorial language,¹⁹ minimizing the at least mocking effect these depictions presented at the expense of the Jews would amount to ignoring crucial aspects. Animals which, in their own surroundings, represented primarily other sins or vices, like the (similarly not kosher) rabbit that stands for sexual promiscuity and homosexuality, the owl and its representation of darkness,²⁰ or the goat with its strong connection

¹⁶ Lipton, *Images of Intolerance*, 21–29, 83–111, particularly 83. For an intriguing insight into the connection of heretics and laughter, see Thomas Scharff, “Lachen über die Ketzer. Religiöse Devianz und Gelächter im Hochmittelalter,” *Lachgemeinschaften: Kulturelle Inszenierungen und soziale Wirkungen im Mittelalter und in der Frühen Neuzeit*, ed. id. Trends in Medieval Philology, 4 (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2005), 17–31.

¹⁷ The pig as a derogatory image was neither reduced to Jews nor used exclusively by Christians. Both Christians and Jews equated Muslims to pigs, see Cuffel, *Gendering Disgust*, 76 and 134, with the example of the *Nizzahon Yashan*, see also Israel Jacob Yuval, “‘They tell lies: you ate the man’: Jewish Reactions to Ritual Murder Accusations,” *Religious Violence between Christians and Jews: Medieval Roots, Modern Perspectives*, ed. Anna Sapir Abulafia (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), 86–106, particularly 91–94; Martin Przybilski, “Zwei Beispiele antichristlicher Polemik in Spätantike und Mittelalter: tol’ dotjeschu und nizzachon jaschan” *Juden und Christen in Mittelalter und Frühneuzeit*, ed. Eveline Brugger and Birgit Wiedl (Innsbruck, Vienna, and Bolzano: StudienVerlag, 2007), 253–68, particularly 260–64, and the contribution of John Sewell in this volume. Furthermore, there are other humiliating rituals that include Jews and swine, like the infamous oath-taking on a swine’s skin (actually with few ‘real-life’ examples), whereas elder ceremonials feature a goat’s skin (twelfth century, only one reference), see a summary of the discussion by Gundula Grebner, “Haltungen zum Judeneid: Texte und Kontexte der Frankfurter Eidesformeln im 14. und 15. Jahrhundert,” “...Ihrer Bürger Freiheit”: *Frankfurt am Main im Mittelalter. Beiträge zur Erinnerung an die Frankfurter Mediaevistin Elsbet Orth*, ed. Heribert Müller. Veröffentlichungen der Frankfurter Historischen Kommission, 22 (Frankfurt a. M.: Waldemar Kramer, 2004), 141–73.

¹⁸ Cuffel, *Gendering Disgust*, 229–31.

¹⁹ Debra Hassig, “The Iconography of Rejection: Jews and Other Monstrous Races,” *Image and Belief: Studies in Celebration of the Eighteenth Anniversary of the Index of Christian Art*, ed. Colum Hourihane (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 25–46, a perception criticized, e.g., by Jung, “The Passion, the Jews, and the Crisis of the Individual,” 164, who unfortunately mixes up Debra Hassig and Debra Higgs Strickland.

²⁰ Higgs Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, & Jews*, 137.

with the devil, nevertheless could form a second, more loose cycle that was based on the 'lowest common factor': the Jews. Jews suckling a lamb's tail,²¹ heretics kissing a cat's anus:²² applying their mouths—site of the ingestion of the immaculate Host by good Catholics—to filthy animal orifices²³ not only aroused disgust against the offenders, be they Jews or other, and drew derogatory smirks, but evoked further association. Money, filth and even obscenity, come to mind, thus providing another link to the Jews; what Sara Lipton has demonstrated so convincingly for the linkage of cat-heretics-Jews is even more applicable to the iconographical patterns surrounding the swine: related yet hitherto unconnected images were strung together to form a new whole.²⁴

The manifold attitudes of the Middle Ages toward animals cannot be discussed here because it was so manifold and could even include friendship and love²⁵; yet it is crucial to an examination of the *Judensau* to consider at least a few points. In contrast to the clear separation between human being and beast that was upheld during the early Middle Ages, the insult consisting more in the equation with the irrational beast,²⁶ the gap started to close from the twelfth century onwards when animals became more and more humanized while simultaneously, the 'beast within' was being recognized in the human beings.²⁷ Animals were being held responsible for their actions and trials against them, though remaining a rarity, were held particularly against swine,²⁸ while punishment through (self-) humiliation by equating the delinquent with an animal spans from the Middle Ages²⁹ throughout the Early Modern Period.³⁰ Animals figure prominently in

²¹ Higgs Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, & Jews*, 120.

²² Lipton, *Images of Intolerance*, 88.

²³ Lipton, *Images of Intolerance*, 90.

²⁴ Lipton, *Images of Intolerance*, 90.

²⁵ *Tiere als Freunde im Mittelalter: Eine Anthologie*. Eingeleitet, ausgewählt, übersetzt und kommentiert von Gabriela Kompatscher zusammen mit Albrecht Classen und Peter Dinzelsbacher (Badenweiler: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag, 2010).

²⁶ Cuffel, *Gendering Disgust*, who focusses on the connection of the irrational and the female. Abulafia, "Christians and Jews in the High Middle Ages," 23; Debra Higgs Strickland, "The Jews, Leviticus, and the Unclean in Medieval English Bestiaries," *Beyond the Yellow Badge*, 203–32; here 227–28 (on Peter the Venerable and Alan of Lille).

²⁷ Salisbury, *The Beast Within*; Peter Dinzelsbacher, *Das fremde Mittelalter: Gottesurteil und Tierprozess* (Essen: Magnus Verlag, 2006), 139. Furthermore, animal behavior was described to convey moral lessons and point out desired Christian behavior, see Higgs Strickland, "The Jews, Leviticus, and the Unclean," 203.

²⁸ Dinzelsbacher, *Das fremde Mittelalter*, 110–11 and 113. The system of trial and punishment worked the other way round, too: e.g., according to Burgundian law, a falcon that had been stolen had the right to pick six ounces of flesh out of his thief's body, *id.*, 143.

²⁹ Famous is the scene of El Cid's reconciliation with King Alfonso where he, in an act of self-humiliation, acts like cattle: "Forthwith to earth he bends him on the hand and on the knee. And the grass of the meadow with his very teeth he rent." Quoted after the online version of *The Lay of the Cid*, translated by R. Selden Rose and Leonard Bacon (Berkeley: University of California

medieval iconography, both as 'themselves' and as representation of one or more characteristics, traits, or groups of people. While some beasts are assigned an exclusively positive image, like the panther or the phoenix,³¹ others, like the dog,³² are of diverse interpretation, according to the context they are used in. Allegories of Jews and animals are manifold, and it does not come as a surprise that those linked with the Jews, the sow being but one among them, are in the rarest of cases provided with a positive interpretation. Instead, they are regularly associated with uncleanness and irrational and bestial nature.³³ The aforementioned rabbit, or hare, with its connotation of sexual deviance, is hunted to death by dogs, as Christians will eventually overcome the Jews. The owl with its preference for darkness over light is equated with the Jews' obstinate refusal of the light of Christ,³⁴ and is attacked by smaller birds, like righteous Christians would rebel against the wicked Jew while the owl-Jew remains stoic, persevering in his wrongs.³⁵ Lest the spectator miss the connection, a more visible insult was sometimes added by giving depictions of owls' 'Jewish features' by turning its beak into the likeness of a hooked nose.³⁶ Obduracy against the truth of the Christian faith had been, and would remain, one of the central reproaches against the Jews throughout the Middle Ages, utilized already in the vernacular sermons

Press, 1919), <http://omacil.org/Cid/> (last accessed on Jan. 30, 2010). The equation human-animal as a ritual of humiliation is pointed out by Dinzelbacher, "Mensch und Tier in der Geschichte Europas: Mittelalter," *Mensch und Tier in der Geschichte Europas*, ed. id. Kröners Taschenausgabe, 34 (Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner Verlag, 2000), 181–292; here 198.

³⁰ Bianca Frohne, "Narren, Tiere und gewreliche Figuren: Zur Inszenierung komischer Körperlichkeit im Kontext von Bloßstellung, Spott und Schande vom 13. bis zum 16. Jahrhundert," *Glaubensstreit und Gelächter: Reformation und Lachkultur im Mittelalter und in der Frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Christoph Auffarth and Sonja Kerth. Religionen in der pluralen Welt, 6 (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2008), 19–54; here 42–43, gives the example of what is known as *Schandsteine* (literally 'stones of disgrace'), stones in the shape of animals that were considered disgusting or infamous, like dogs or toads, that had to be carried around by the perpetrator as a form of public punishment.

³¹ Debra Hassig, *Medieval Bestiaries: Text, Image, Ideology* (Cambridge, New York, and Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 156–66 (panther), 72–83 (phoenix); see also Romy Günthart, "Der Phönix: Vom Christussymbol zum Firmenlogo," *Dämonen, Monster, Fabelwesen*, ed. Ulrich Müller and Werner Wunderlich. Mittelalter Mythen, 2 (St. Gallen, UVK. Fachverlag für Wissenschaft und Studium, 1999), 467–83.

³² Peter Dinzelbacher, "Mensch und Tier," 220. See below for the usage of dogs with regard to Jews.

³³ Higgs Strickland, "The Jews, Leviticus, and the Unclean," 227.

³⁴ Miyazaki, "Misericord Owls and Medieval Anti-Semitism," 27–28; Higgs Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, & Jews*, 137; Hassig, *Medieval Bestiaries*, 97–98.

³⁵ Miyazaki, "Misericord Owls and Medieval Anti-Semitism," 33.

³⁶ Miyazaki, "Misericord Owls and Medieval Anti-Semitism," 28–29; Higgs Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, & Jews*, 77–78, who gives evidence of the hooked nose being a general signifier of 'evilness', e.g., used in images of (non-Jewish) executioners or torturers of saints, see also Amishai-Maisels, "Demonization of the 'Other' in the Visual Arts," 53–54, with the example of an English manuscript where in the betrayal of Christ, the Romans are depicted as black (i.e., Muslims) with hooked noses and Jewish hats.

of the early Middle Ages,³⁷ an obduracy, almost defiance, that was all the worse because it was done deliberately; and thus Christians felt a certain right to mock the Jews since their obduracy provoked it.³⁸

The ravenous hyena, changing its sex at will³⁹ and devouring corpses,⁴⁰ is as much a symbol of the unclean, idolatrous Jew as the mythical mantichore of the mid thirteenth-century Salisbury bestiary with its pointed Phrygian hat, long beard and grotesque profile⁴¹; their monstrosity, so pointedly non-human, is even heightened by the deeds they commit. The mantichore-Jew hybrid has the remains of a human leg between his jaws, the hyena feeds on human corpses: an allusion to both cannibalism associated with monsters and barbarians, and ritual murder accusations against Jews,⁴² the blood libels that had started off in England in 1144⁴³—a quite ‘sophisticated’ reference that later would be stripped of all possible ambiguity and be hammered home: possibly in the early fourteenth-century Cologne *Judensau*,⁴⁴ and most definitely, and blatantly so, in the *Judensau* of

³⁷ Gunnar Mikosch, “Nichts als Diskurse: Juden in den frühen mittelhochdeutschen Predigten des 12. und 13. Jahrhunderts,” *Historische Diskursanalysen: Genealogie, Theorie, Anwendungen*, ed. Franz X. Eder (Wiesbaden: Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2006), 253–69; here 260–61.

³⁸ Johannes Heil, ‘Gottesfeinde’—‘Menschenfeinde’: *Die Vorstellung von jüdischer Weltverschwörung (13. bis 16. Jahrhundert)*. Antisemitismus: Geschichte und Struktur, 3 (Essen: Klartext Verlag, 2006), 170; Lipton, *Images of Intolerance*, 70–72, on the ‘visual presentation’ of this reproach.

³⁹ The idea that hyenas could change their sex (not only a European-centered myth) goes back to the fact that the genitalia of the female are protruding, thus resembling a penis. Already Aristotle had spoken against that assumption, as the UC Berkeley hyena specialist, Stephen E. Glickman, has pointed out in his summing up of the ‘bad reputation’ history of the hyena, “The Spotted Hyena from Aristotle to the Lion King: Reputation is Everything—In the Company of Animals” *Social Research* 1995.3, text online at (last accessed on Jan. 30, 2010): http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2267/is_n3_v62/ai_17909878/?tag=content;col1.

⁴⁰ Hassig, *Medieval Bestiaries*, 145–55, 174; id., “Sex in the Bestiaries,” *The Mark of the Beast*, 71–98, here 74–75; Higgs Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, & Jews*, 147–48, 153–54; id., “The Jews, Leviticus, and the Unclean,” 209–11.

⁴¹ Higgs Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, & Jews*, 136, figure 60 and pl. 3; Pamela Gravestock, “Did Imaginary Animals Exist?,” *The Mark of the Beast*, 119–40; here 121.

⁴² Claudine Fabre-Vassas, *The Singular Beast: Jews, Christians, & the Pig*, trans. from the French by Carol Volk. Sec. ed. European Perspectives (1994; New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 136–37, draws the daring yet utterly compelling parallel between Christian pig breeding & raising and all the rituals that go with it, pork consumption and the ‘slaughtering’ of Christian children by Jews (see below).

⁴³ Higgs Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, & Jews*, 136; Anna Sapir Abulafia, “Christians and Jews in the High Middle Ages: Christian Views of Jews,” *Jews of Europe*, 19–28; here 26–27. There is a legion of relevant research on William of Norwich, see, for instance, Friedrich Lotter, “Innocens virgo et martyr: Thomas von Monmouth und die Verbreitung der Ritualmordlegende im Hochmittelalter,” *Die Legende vom Ritualmord: Zur Geschichte der Blutbeschuldigung gegen Juden*, ed. Rainer Erb (Berlin: Metropol, 1993), 25–72, and the general discussion by Anthony Bale, *The Jew in the Medieval Book: English Antisemitisms 1350–1500* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 105–44 (with the example of Robert of Bury St Edmunds).

⁴⁴ Shachar, *Judensau*, 24–25.

Frankfurt that was linked to the alleged murder of Simon of Trent, leaving no place for doubts about the Jews' viciousness. With the new emphasis on transubstantiation and the Eucharist emerging as a sacrament, the accusations of host desecration and blood libels are mirrored in the depiction and presentation of Jews in many regards: apart from allusive motifs like Jews holding knives or having bloodstains on their clothes, scenes of Jews abducting, tormenting, and slaughtering a Christian child very quickly became a popular subject for paintings and, particularly, prints, intensifying and channelling the anti-Jewish sentiments that culminated in the abovementioned combination of a *Judensau* and the blood libel of Simon of Trent.⁴⁵

Equally vicious is the scorpion who surfaces particularly as the heraldic animal on banners, pennants, shields, and armors of Jews appearing in passion plays and passion scenes in the visual representations; sometimes, the allegorical figure of *Synagoga* accompanying a group of Jews is also portrayed carrying a scorpion banner.⁴⁶ Scorpions, in Christian theological tradition, are not only malevolent but deceitful: they are peaceful in appearance, friendly on the surface, yet woe betide anyone who touches them, they will sting with their venomous barb which they had so treacherously kept hidden from view — like the Jews, who appear as if they meant no harm yet seek to poison Christians with their false teachings. Even as late as 1563, in the infamous broadsheet *Der Juden zukünftiger Messias* that contributed in a major fashion to the dissemination of the *Judensau* image that formed the center of the woodcut,⁴⁷ a fire-breathing scorpion is hovering above the procession of Jews who are led to Hell by two devils.

⁴⁵ Lipton, "Images and their uses," 279–80. To be released soon is the new book by Sara Lipton, *Dark Mirror: Jews, Vision, and Witness in Medieval Christian Art* (New York: Metropolitan Books, forthcoming). See Petra Schöner, *Judenbilder im deutschen Einblattdruck der Renaissance: Ein Beitrag zur Imagologie*. Saecula Spiritalia 42 (Baden-Baden: Valentin Koerner, 2002), 111–62, with a very critical review by Falk Eisermann, *Aschenas: Zeitschrift für Geschichte und Kultur der Juden* 13.1 (2003): 270–72. For the literary development, see Miri Rubin, *Gentile Tales: The Narrative Assault on Late Medieval Jews*. The Middle Ages Series (1999; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), with a reference to broadsheets, 173–80.

⁴⁶ Schouwink, *Der wilde Eber*, 82–83, Herbert Jochum, "Ecclesia und Synagoga. Alter und Neuer Bund in der christlichen Kunst," *Der ungekündigte Bund? Antworten des Neuen Testaments*, ed. Hubert Frankemölle. Quaestiones Disputatae, 172 (Freiburg, Basel, and Vienna: Herder, 1998), 248–76; here 258; Higgs Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, & Jews*, 176–77, fig. 85 and pl. 12: in the background of a late fifteenth-century passion scene from Cologne, Jews are bearing banners with the emblems of the dragon and the scorpion.

⁴⁷ Shachar, *Judensau*, 55–56 and pl. 46, interprets it as a rendition of the Frankfurt *Judensau* which has been argued against by Gundula Grebner, "Die Judensaudarstellung am Frankfurter Brückentor als Schandbild. Funktionen der Bekleidung von Juden im Bild," *Kopf- und andere Tücher*, ed. Gisela Engel and Susanne Scholz. Salecina-Beiträge zur Gesellschafts- und Kulturkritik, 6 (Berlin: trafo verlag, 2005), 87–102; here 90.

As serious as the context, and primary intent, of these beast allegories may be,⁴⁸ humor is often utilized to add a further quality. The corbels in the choir of the Xanten Cathedral might portray the evil counterpart to the holy Visitation scene they support yet might have drawn the attention of bypassers mainly due to their *drôlerie*-like appearance, as might the almost caricature-like faces of the owls or the bizarre profile of the mantichore, while gargoyles, whichever shape they may take on, had, in addition to inducing fear and intimidation, a definite comical aspect *per se*.⁴⁹ Furthermore, topsy-turvyness is a key feature of the medieval choice of animals representing Jews:⁵⁰ the owl that flies backwards and at night, the hyena and the rabbit who can change their sex, the hybrid mantichore and the man-nursing pig: animals who act contrary to nature, like the Jews act contrary to the real faith, a truly abhorrent thing—and yet the comical element of a topsy-turvy world is present,⁵¹ resounding in the inscription attached to the fifteenth-century *Judensau* in the choir of the Cathedral of Freising that ‘sets it right’ again: “So wahr die Maus die Katz nit frisst, wird der Jud kein wahrer Christ” (as much as the mouse does not eat the cat, the Jew won’t become a true Christian).⁵²

Although mentioning that anti-Jewish polemics, in whichever form, existed in regions without Jewish settlements is almost tantamount to a commonplace by now, it is nevertheless important to state that evidence of a connection between the creation of a *Judensau* in either of the aforementioned cities and actual violence

⁴⁸ Lipton, *Images of Intolerance*, 43–44, adds raven and frog/toad to the list, which appear in French manuscripts, see also Mary E. Robbins, “The Truculent Toad in the Middle Ages,” *Animals in the Middle Ages: A Book of Essays*, ed. Nona C. Flores. Garland Medieval Casebooks, 13 (New York and London: Garland, 1996), 25–48.

⁴⁹ For a detailed study of grotesque Jewish features contrasted with noble Christian faces, see Jung, “The Passion, the Jews, and the Crisis of the Individual,” 154–56, and throughout the article. See further Janetta Rebold Benton, “Gargoyles: Animal Imagery and Artistic Individuality in Medieval Art,” *Animals in the Middle Ages*, 147–65, particularly 158–59; ead., *Holy Terrors: Gargoyles on Medieval Buildings* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1997); Albrecht Classen, “Gargoyles — Wasserspeier: Phantasieprodukte des Mittelalters und der Moderne,” (here 127 and 130) and Peter Dinzelsbacher, “Monster und Dämonen am Kirchenbau,” both *Dämonen, Monster, Fabelwesen*, 127–33 and 103–26, respectively. Dinzelsbacher, 111, cites the doyen of German art history, Georg Dehio, who complains about academics taking the grotesque monsters at medieval churches seriously instead of interpreting them as the expression of ‘insignificant humor.’

⁵⁰ On the topsy-turvy world as a place of inverse relationships of animals and humans, see Janetta Rebold Benton, *Medieval Mischief: Wit and Humour in the Art of the Middle Ages* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2004), 69.

⁵¹ The discussion on the comical aspects of the topsy-turvy world and its instrumentalization are manifold. With a focus on the German-speaking areas, see Michael Kupfer, *Zur Semiotik der Inversion: Verkehrte Welt und Lachkultur im 16. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: Verlag für Wissenschaft und Bildung, 1993); *Komische Gegenwelten: Lachen und Literatur in Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit*, ed. Werner Röcke and Helga Neumann (Paderborn, Munich, and Vienna: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1999).

⁵² Shachar, *Judensau*, 33.

against Jews, or even their physical presence, is scarce.⁵³ Jewish settlement took place either later, not before the early fourteenth century (Brandenburg, Bad Wimpfen) or no evidence of a medieval Jewish population can be traced at all (Lemgo). As for Xanten and Magdeburg, cities that not only share the existence of a large medieval Jewish population but also a history of violence against their Jews, any temporal correlation with the existence of a *Judensau* is unprovable at best. The Jews of Xanten were slaughtered during the first crusade;⁵⁴ whereas Magdeburg, the town that had seen its archbishop Albrecht II kiss the Torah of the Jews who greeted him along with other citizens upon his arrival from Rome in 1207,⁵⁵ persecuted its Jews several times throughout the thirteenth and early fourteenth century. Yet the link between an anti-Jewish riot in 1266/1267 and the dating of the Madgeburg *Judensau* has been questioned, and proved highly unlikely, by Shachar.⁵⁶ It, however, also signifies that whoever commissioned the creation of a *Judensau* felt certain that the imagery would be understood, even if the spectators had never once in their lives come across a real Jew.

Why the swine, then? The general importance of images for the inhabitants of medieval Europe cannot be underestimated: Bernhard Blumenkranz called the walls of medieval churches 'huge picture books',⁵⁷ while other scholars have pointed out the impact sermons had on the illiterate masses, which taught them how to read the paintings and sculptures they came across in- and outside the church: 'a picture,' as (allegedly) Pope Gregory the Great put it in a letter, 'is like a lesson for the people.'⁵⁸ Nevertheless, manuscripts remained exclusive to a

⁵³ Edith Wenzel has stated the same for Frankfurt and Alsfeld as the place of late medieval passion-plays, where the Jewish population has been overestimated, "*Do worden die Judden alle geschant*": *Rolle und Funktion der Juden in spätmittelalterlichen Spielen*. *Forschungen zur Geschichte der älteren deutschen Literatur*, 14 (München: Fink, 1992), 12–13; for Naumburg see Jung, "The Passion, the Jews, and the Crisis of the Individual," 173–74.

⁵⁴ Hebräische Berichte über die Judenverfolgung während des Ersten Kreuzzugs, ed. Eva Haverkamp. *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*, Hebräische Texte aus dem mittelalterlichen Deutschland, 1 (Hanover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 2005), 432–43 (Hebrew and German translation).

⁵⁵ Oswald Holder-Egger (Ed.), "*Cronica Reinhardsbrunnensis*" *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*, *Scriptores* 30, part 1 (rpt. 1896; Stuttgart: Anton Hiersemann Verlag, 1976), 490–656; here 571, online at www.dmgf.de (last accessed on Jan. 30, 2010). Jewish settlement in Madgeburg dates back into the twelfth century, see Alfred Haverkamp, "Jews and Urban Life: Bonds and Relationships," *The Jews of Europe in the Middle Ages (Tenth to Fifteenth Centuries)*. Proceedings of the International Symposium held at Speyer, 20–25 October 2002, ed. Christoph Cluse. *Cultural Encounters in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, 4 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), 55–70; here 63.

⁵⁶ Shachar, *Judensau*, 19.

⁵⁷ Bernhard Blumenkranz, *Juden und Judentum in der mittelalterlichen Kunst* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1965), 9.

⁵⁸ See for a recent summary of the extensive discussion the highly instructive article by Sara Lipton, "Images and Their Uses," *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, 4: *Christianity in Western Europe c. 1100–c. 1500*, ed. Miri Rubin and Walter Simons (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge

minority of the population⁵⁹; the deciphering of vice cycles requested either a certain level of education or constant re-hearing about it,⁶⁰ and to fully appreciate their various allegations required a profound religious knowledge that went beyond years of exposure to sermons, however explanatory, and having been read Biblical and liturgical texts.⁶¹ Even more so, to really and fully understand the vileness and malignance of a scorpion or the obduracy of an owl, it was indispensable to have undergone a certain education.⁶² Therefore, it does not surprise that the equations of Jews with beasts that prevailed, and moved out of their sophisticated context, were those with animals that were 'accessible' in everyday contact and therefore understandable to the populace. Jews sentenced to death by hanging were accompanied by two dogs that were hanged on either side of the Jew;⁶³ Jews were riding goats or were accompanied by these, like the *Synagoga* statue at Erfurt that holds a goat's head. Whereas medieval art was more to bring to life already existing teaching and not to teach new things,⁶⁴ people would need no additional explanation, given before or after contemplating the image, to understand the filthiness of a swine. Even if the uneducated spectators missed the link of Jews–swine–devil, they would understand the very mundane association of Jews with filth, stench, and uncleanness. Pigs were linked with excrement and wrong belief already in early Christian symbolism (which they

University Press, 2009), 254–82, quote 254. Unfortunately, I did not have the possibility to look at the latest article by Alfred Messerli. Editor's note: Alfred Messerli, "Intermedialität," *Stimmen, Texte und Bilder zwischen Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit*, ed. Luisa Rubini Messerli and Alexander Schwarz. Tausch. Textanalyse in Universität und Schule, 17 (Bern, Berlin, et al.: Peter Lang, 2009), 75–109. Drawing on previous scholarship, especially by Rudolf Schenda (1987), he emphasizes, 94–97, that 1. most of the truly valuable images or pictures were kept out of view by the public anyway, such as in the case of book illustrations and miniatures, and that 2. most ordinary people lacked in the "perceptual skills" even to understand, or to read what they saw. Ironically, this probably applies very much still to our world today.

⁵⁹ Lipton, "Images and their uses," 262.

⁶⁰ Lipton, "Images and their uses," 264, cites the story about Duke Godfrey of Bouillon, who, even after listening to the sermon, demanded explanations of every single image and picture in a church.

⁶¹ Annette Weber, "Glaube und Wissen—Ecclesia et Synagoga," *Wissenspopularisierung: Konzepte der Wissensverbreitung im Wandel*, ed. Carsten Kretschmann. Wissenskultur und gesellschaftlicher Wandel, 4 (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2003), 89–126; here 94, states the same für *Ecclesia/Synagoga* pairings.

⁶² Still basic on the question whether medieval 'pictures speak for themselves' is Lawrence G. Duggan, "Was Art Really the 'Book of the Illiterate'?", *Word and Image*, 5.3 (1989), 227–51. See also Lipton, "Images and Their Uses," and Messerli, "Intermedialität."

⁶³ Ronnie Po-Chia Hsia, *The Myth of Ritual Murder: Jews and Magic in Reformation Germany* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988), 26 and 28 with figure 3; Frey, "Vergleiche von Juden mit Hunden," 129–33.

⁶⁴ Lipton, "Images and their Uses," 264.

shared with Pagans and Jews),⁶⁵ while the *foetor iudaicus* derived from a punishment for the killing of Christ – and the *Judensau* brought these two elements together: the pigs and their excrement, and the Jews who feed on them. Yet the pig as a symbol for filth and dirt was to a great extent self-explanatory: it was visible and smell-able for the majority of people on a daily basis. And however often Christians would consume pork – the sow remained the only mammal the milk of which was not put to use – and even if they were not aware of the antique theory that the mere tasting of a sow's milk would result in contracting rashes, even leprosy,⁶⁶ they would perhaps smile about the fact that the Jews, who abstained from eating pork, would feed on the very part that was not fit for consumption.

In the course of the fourteenth century, the *Judensau* took on a more and more unified appearance that in its main traits resembled the Magdeburg frieze: apart from a few examples (Cologne, Colmar), the 'standard' *Judensau* was now a standing sow that was held by or touched at the head by a Jew standing in front of it. One or more usually smaller Jews were kneeling below its belly and suckling its teats while another Jew was busy fondling the animal's hindquarters.⁶⁷ It was, however, a depiction still exclusively utilised by the church: sculptures of the *Judensau* remained on the in- or outside of churches or monasteries, and about half of the fourteenth-century *Judensau* sculptures form a part of a cycle of vices,⁶⁸ with their representation of *gula* remaining the key (if not only) function. However, the

⁶⁵ Cuffel, *Gendering Disgust*, 67.

⁶⁶ Claudius Aelianus, *De natura animalium* X.16, newest edition: Claudius Aelianus, *De natura animalium*, ed. Manuela García Valdés, Luis Alfonso Llera Fueyo, and Lucía Rodríguez-Noriega Guillén. Bibliotheca scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana, 2006 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2009), the linkage pointed out by Fabre-Vassas, *The Singular Beast*, 108. The fear of contacting leprosy as a reason for the Jews' abhorrence of pork had been the pun of several jokes in Greek and Roman antique literature, see Sevenster, *The Roots of Pagan anti-Semitism*, 135–39.

⁶⁷ See Shachar, *Judensau*, pl. 18 (Metz, Regensburg), 19–21 (Uppsala), 23 (Gniezno), 25b and c (Nordhausen), 26–27 (Wittenberg). Other *Judensau* statues have been documented for Ahrweiler (ca. 1295, gargoyle at St Laurent's church), Bacherach (ca. 1290, Werner's chapel, gargoyle), Bamberg (Cathedral), Basel (ca. 1432, destroyed), Bayreuth (parish church), Bützow (mid-fourteenth century, abbey church), Calbe (gargoyle at St. Stephen's church), Nuremberg (ca. 1370, east choir of St. Sebald's church) and Zerbst (two examples: St Nicolas' church, ca. 1447; carved wooden beam from a residential house at the market place, now municipal museum), see Hermann Rusam, *Judensau-Darstellungen in der plastischen Kunst Bayerns: ein Zeugnis christlicher Judenfeindschaft*. Begegnungen, 90, Sonderheft (Hanover: Evangelisch-Lutherischer Zentralverein für Begegnung von Christen und Juden, 2007) and the illustrated book by Regina E. G. Schymiczek, *Höllenbrut und Himmelswächter: Mittelalterliche Wasserspeier an Kirchen und Kathedralen* (Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 2006). The often listed gate at Remagen shows a sow and piglets that is, despite the similarities in the structure, without any reference to Jews, see Shachar, *Judensau*, 12 and pl. 2 and 3a.

⁶⁸ Shachar, *Judensau*, 31–32.

additional aspect(s) that was already present in the earliest sculptures was drifting more and more into the focus: with the Jews taking up more and more space, becoming more prominent foreground players, they were being more and more condemned solely for being Jews than for being sinners sticking to their vices. Even if we will have to set the 'explicit abusive intention' a lot earlier than Shachar, in fact with the first appearance of the *Judensau*, it is quite obvious that a shift in the central meaning of the motif occurred.

First and foremost, the *Judensau* moves from inside to the outside of the churches. With the exception of the *Judensau* gargoyle of Bad Wimpfen, which is placed about eight metres above ground,⁶⁹ the thirteenth-century *Judensäue* remained on the inside: the atrium of the respective churches in Magdeburg and Lemgo, the nave in Eberswalde, and the choir and the cloisters of Xanten and Brandenburg, respectively. These sculptures and friezes were, unlike their successors, visible only by the visitors of the church, some to an even more limited group of people, those with limited access, e.g., to the cloisters of the Brandenburg Cathedral. However much, though, these *Judensäue* might have educated, disgusted, and amused Christian churchgoers, there was only a scant chance that they were ever seen by Jews,⁷⁰ and even so, their positioning inside churches gives evidence that Jews were not the target audience. They were not intended as jokes, and even if they evoke a smile from a passing-by monk or visitor, their underlying meaning is dead serious: a warning for the Christians not to become a sinner, which was illustrated by a series of depictions the Jews were merely a part of.

The *Judensäue* (pl.) that follow these early examples are placed quite differently within the ecclesiastical and urban space. Although some remain privy to the eyes of a few, like the carved reliefs in the choir stalls of the Cathedrals of Nordhausen and Cologne, the latter of which, in addition to the sow-feeding and -suckling, features a quite likely allusion to the Werner of Oberwesel legend,⁷¹ or the capitals in Gniezno (Poland) and Metz (France) that are still in the inside of the churches. The majority of the *Judensäue* of the following centuries, however, were visible from the outside: gargoyles, like on the St Martin's Minster of Colmar (France, south of Strasbourg) or the St Mary's church of Heiligenstadt (south-east of Göttingen), or relief sculptures like two of the most prominent examples, those of the Cathedral of Regensburg (Ratisbon, see figure 2) and the parish church at Wittenberg (see figure 3). Although they are placed up high (seven and eight

⁶⁹ Shachar, *Judensau*, 12–13.

⁷⁰ While there is definite evidence of Christians showing no qualms to enter a synagogue, the question whether Jews had (and wanted) access to churches is much debated, see lately Martha Keil, "Orte der jüdischen Öffentlichkeit: Judenviertel, Synagoge, Friedhof," *Ein Thema – zwei Perspektiven*, 170–86.

⁷¹ Shachar, *Judensau*, 24–25; Rohrbacher and Schmidt, *Judenbilder*, 310–11.

meters respectively), they are in plain view of any passer-by who no longer had to enter the church to experience a shudder of disgust and share a good laugh at the bizarre sight of humans or half-humans suckling the teats of a swine. Shachar identifies the Regensburg sculpture as part of a cycle of virtues and vices—there are sculptures of other animals next to and above the buttress that carries the *Judensau*—but he is definitely a tad too gentle when he doubts any intention as anti-Jewish mockery.⁷²

However much the city of Regensburg, where one of the largest Jewish communities within the realms of the Holy Roman Empire was allowed to flourish, tended to be protective of their Jews and even actively shielded them from the Rindfleisch riots in 1298 and the persecutions accompanying the Black Death in 1349/50,⁷³ there is no denying the at least additional, if not already basic purpose of deriding the Jews by use of a metaphorical language even the inhabitants of a 'Jew-friendly' city as Regensburg would understand immediately; even more so since the main Jewish living quarters were located in closest vicinity of the Cathedral, the *Judensau* therefore being within immediate sight of those it was mocking.⁷⁴

The case is different in Wittenberg:⁷⁵ perhaps the most well-known of the *Judensau* sculptures due to Martin Luther's reference to it in his *Vom Schem Hamphoras und vom Geschlecht Christi* and the inscription subsequently placed above the sculpture, it was however quite singular already in its time of origin. Not only is there no evidence of it being part of a larger motif or cycle, but it takes up the topic of one of the Jews fondling the sow's hindquarters in a very distinctly obscene way. Had the previous execution of this motif consisted in Jews merely touching the sow's hindquarters or tail, the Jew of Wittenberg grabs the sow's behind with both hands, with one hand lifting the animal's right hind-leg, with the other lifting or holding its tail. His head is tilted to the side, and there can be no mistaking as to where his gaze is directed: right at the sow's anus. Whereas earlier *Judensäue* serve multiple purposes—representation of vices, warning to the

⁷² Shachar, *Judensau*, 26–27.

⁷³ *Germania Judaica*, vol. II: *Von 1238 bis zur Mitte des 14. Jahrhunderts*, part 2: Maastricht – Zwolle, ed. Zwi Avneri (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1968), 679–80; Jonathan Elukin, *Living Together, Living Apart: Rethinking Jewish-Christian Relations in the Middle Ages*. Jews, Christians, and Muslims from the Ancient to the Modern World (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007), 106–09.

⁷⁴ For the location of the 'Jewish quarter', see *Germania Judaica*, vol. I: *Von den ältesten Zeiten bis 1238*, ed. Ismar Elbogen, Aron Freimann, and Haim Tykocinski (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1963), 287–88, and with some corrections *Germania Judaica* II/2, 686, and Markus Wenninger, "Grenzen in der Stadt? Zur Lage und Abgrenzung mittelalterlicher deutscher Judenviertel," *Grenzen und Grenzüberschreitungen: Kulturelle Beziehungen zwischen Juden und Christen im Mittelalter*, ed. Edith Wenzel. Part of *Aschkenas: Zeitschrift für Geschichte und Kultur der Juden* 14.1 (2004): 9–29; here 19.

⁷⁵ Shachar, *Judensau*, 30–31, 43–51 (on the later history of the Wittenberg *Judensau*), pl. 26–27.

Christians, jibing at Jews—the ‘new’ ones show a single intention, and that is to insult the Jews on as many levels as possible.

With respect to the comical factor, this move of the *Judensau* from the inside to the outside cannot be underestimated in its impact. The recognition of laughing, or rather the different forms laughter can take on, as a way of social interaction goes back a long way,⁷⁶ while the idea of the imminent importance of (rituals of) laughter for the constitution, consolidation, and communication of communities has been underrepresented,⁷⁷ at least in a historical context. Werner Röcke and Hans Rudolf Velten have in their anthology translated the concept of ‘laughing communities’ (*Lachgemeinschaften*) into the historical perspective, stressing its importance for the constitution of communities and their self-definition. In the context of these laughing communities,⁷⁸ it becomes obvious that the relocation of the *Judensau* had multiple effects on both the laughers and those laughed at. By translating it from the ecclesiastical into the lay sphere and moving it down from its former heights to the (almost) eye level of the commoners, the laughing community increased rapidly in number. In addition to that, the laughter took on a new quality since the Jews were excluded from this community in a completely different way.⁷⁹ In contrast to before, when they were excluded from a joke that was told at a place where they had no or at best only very restricted access to, they were now shut out from it in public, maybe even in their presence, under the eyes of those who were, at that very moment, having fun at their expense. Although this practice of combining two actions—excluding a specific group from the ‘in-group’ of laughers and simultaneously exposing them as the targeted laughing stocks in their presence—was quite commonly used both in pictorial art and on stage against several groups or individuals, e.g., women, beggars, or even the authority, the Jews remained a prime target.⁸⁰ The further development of the

⁷⁶ For a recent sum-up of the development of theories on laughter, see Werner Röcke and Hans Rudolf Velten, “Einleitung,” *Lachgemeinschaften: Kulturelle Inszenierungen und soziale Wirkungen im Mittelalter und in der Frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Werner Röcke and Hans Rudolf Velten. Trends in Medieval Philology 4 (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 2005), ix–xxxix; here xi–xxiv.

⁷⁷ Gerd Althoff, “Vom Lächeln zum Verlachen,” *Lachgemeinschaften*, 3–16; here 4. Of extreme importance for the recognition of laughter as a social process is Mary Douglas’s anthropological essay “The Social Control of Cognition: Some Factors in Joke Perception,” first published in 1970, latest reprint in *Implicit Meanings: Selected Essays in Anthropology*. Sec. ed. Collected works of Mary Douglas, 5 (New York and London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), 146–64. See also Albrecht Classen’s comment in the Introduction to the present volume.

⁷⁸ For a definition of the term ‘Lachgemeinschaften,’ see Röcke and Velten, “Einleitung,” ix–xxxix.

⁷⁹ Unfortunately, I did not have the possibility to look into the basic work of Eugène Dupreel, who has distinguished in his sociological essay *Le problème sociologique du rire* between ‘including’ and ‘excluding’ laughter (*rire d’accueil* vs. *rire d’exclusion*, quoted after Röcke and Velten, “Einleitung,” xiii), yet his distinction requires further subdivisions.

⁸⁰ Christoph Auffarth, “Alle Tage Karneval? Reformation, Provokation und Grobianismus,” *Glaubensstreit und Gelächter*, 79–105; here 87.

Judensau gives ample evidence to this. Standing alone, outside any context, moralising or otherwise, the *Judensau* is no longer an allegory of sinners in the 'shape' of Jews but a depiction of Jews. Furthermore, the tendency to an emphasis of the obscene is increasing and translated into other means of dissemination that take up the topic.

One of the most important shifts that characterizes the development of the motif during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries is a further expansion of not only the audience but also the 'owners' of *Judensau* sculptures. Had the move from the inside to the outside of churches and monasteries already brought new qualities and aspects—while reducing others—the *Judensau* becomes more and more personalized in the course of the Early Modern Period. Secular authorities, but also non-official parties, even individuals, begin to take hold of the possibility to acquire their own, personal *Judensau*. The town officials of Salzburg (Austria) paid the considerable sum of six florins to the known sculptor Hans Valkenauer and the painter Heinrich *umb den Juden und saw ratturm* ('for the Jews and sow [on the] tower of the town hall', see figure 4) in 1487,⁸¹ the gate of the castle at Cadolzburg (west of Nuremberg) as well as (presumably) a gate in the town of Aschersleben (south of Magdeburg) sported a *Judensau*.⁸² Reliefs with sows suckling Jews appear on private houses, like a pharmacy in Bavaria's Kelheim (southwest of Regensburg), or in Spalt (south of Nuremberg)⁸³ and Wiener Neustadt, (Austria, south of Vienna)⁸⁴—everyone could have their own *Judensau*, at least those who could afford it, could bring it into their own home and enjoy the joke in private. They could present the joke to others and share a laugh with them. The once rather sophisticated (yet no less cruel) witticism, understandable in its entirety to only a few learned scholars, had literally moved down from church spires and out of cloisters and had turned into a broad joke that was accessible to everyone who happened to pass by. The *Judensau* had now entirely moved from the ecclesiastical to the lay sphere; not only could it be seen but also owned by lay people. This also

⁸¹ Archiv der Stadt Salzburg (Municipal Archives of Salzburg), BU 264, Raitbuch Hans Glavenberger, entry to 1487. Eleven years later, the Jews of Salzburg were expelled, see Markus Wenninger, "Zur Geschichte der Juden in Salzburg," *Geschichte Salzburgs Stadt und Land, I.2: Mittelalter*, ed. Heinz Dopsch und Hans Spatzenegger (Salzburg: Anton Pustet, 1983), 747–56, here 755–56.

⁸² Shachar, *Judensau*, 37–38, who is however doubtful of the Ascherleben example since the only reference is to a gate called *Sautor* ('sow's gate').

⁸³ There is a second *Judensau* to be found in Spalt, at the parish church St Wenceslas of Theilenberg, today an urban district of Spalt.

⁸⁴ Shachar, *Judensau*, 38–40; Eveline Brugger, "Von der Ansiedlung bis zur Vertreibung – Juden in Österreich im Mittelalter," *Geschichte der Juden in Österreich*, ed. ead., Christoph Lind, Albert Lichtblau, and Barbara Staudinger. Österreichische Geschichte, 15 (Vienna: Ueberreuter, 2006), 123–228; here 176 (illustration of the Wiener Neustädter *Judensau*).

meant that Jews now could not only see the *Judensau*, but knew precisely who meant them to see it, adding a personal layer to the multiple levels of insult.

Among these—though not a sculpture but a painting—is the *Judensau* of Frankfurt, along with the Wittenberg example the most influential and widespread depiction.⁸⁵ Placed in the public passage of the *Alte Brückenturm*, the busy passage across the river Main, and originally set next to a crucifixion, it introduced in all clarity what the *Judensau* of the choir stall in Cologne had merely hinted at: Above the *Judensau*, a male child was depicted, his naked body covered in wounds while a description explained to the passer-bys that this was, in fact, the famous child-martyr Simon of Trent who had been allegedly murdered by Jews in 1475, triggering a production of broadsheets that aided in spreading the ‘facts’ in a ‘propaganda campaign unique to the late middle ages’.⁸⁶ Combined with a display of hitherto unsurpassed obscenity, the effect the Frankfurt rendition of the *Judensau* had must have been overwhelming, evoking a plethora of feelings and sentiments that spanned from abhorrence and loathing to disgust and fear, and, no doubt, laughter of all kinds. More than its predecessors,⁸⁷ the Frankfurt *Judensau* is blatantly, even aggressively obscene, adding and re-arranging elements that derived not only from the other sculptured *Judensäue* but showed clear influence of the perhaps most crucial means in the further dissemination of the motif, the woodcut pamphlets that had appeared in the first half of the fifteenth century (see figure 5).⁸⁸ The similarities are striking: apart from the suckling Jews, there is a

⁸⁵ Shachar, *Judensau*, 43–51 (later history of the Wittenberg *Judensau*), 52–61 (later history of the Frankfurt *Judensau*).

⁸⁶ Christine Magin and Falk Eisermann, “‘Ettwas zu sagen von den iuden’. Themen und Formen antijüdischer Einblattdrucke im späten 15. Jahrhundert,” *Frömmigkeit—Theologie—Frömmigkeitstheologie: Contributions to European Church History. Festschrift für Berndt Hamm zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. Gudrun Litz, Heidrun Munzert and Roland Liebenberg. Studies in the History of Christian Traditions, 124 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2005), 173–193; here 180. See the seminal study by Wolfgang Treue, *Der Trienter Judenprozeß: Voraussetzungen—Abläufe—Auswirkungen (1475–1588)*. Forschungen zur Geschichte der Juden, Abteilung A: Abhandlungen, 4 (Hanover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 1996), who provides evidence for the fact that no incident had until then provoked such a number of printings to circulate (521). For a use of the dog-image in the course of the accusation of the murder of Simon of Trent, see Stow, *Jewish Dogs*, 6.

⁸⁷ The dating of the Frankfurt *Judensau* is still debated: Shachar, *Judensau*, 36–37, suggests a date between 1475 and 1507, Treue, *Judenprozeß*, 452–56, postpones it to the mid-sixteenth century, while Grebner, “Die Judensaudarstellung am Frankfurter Brückentor als Schandbild,” 90, pleads in favour of a time of origin during the reign of Emperor Maximilian I (who had a distinct preference for the cult of Simon of Trent, see Ronnie Po-Chia Hsia, *Trent 1475: Stories of a Ritual Murder Trial*. Sec. ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 129, Treue, *Judenprozeß*, 473–74).

⁸⁸ For the early woodcuts, see Shachar, *Judensau*, 34–35; Mellinkoff, *Outcasts*, 108; Magin and Eisermann, “‘Ettwas zu sagen von den iuden’”; Kurt Erich Schöndorf, ‘Judenhaß und Toleranz im Spiegel von Flugschriften und Einblattgedrucken des 16. Jahrhunderts,’ *Haß, Verfolgung und Toleranz: Beiträge zum Schicksal der Juden von der Reformation bis in die Gegenwart*, ed. Thomas Sirges and id. Osloer Beiträge zur Germanistik, 24 (Frankfurt a. M., Berlin, Bern, et al.: Peter Lang, 2000), 11–46,

Jew, in some reproductions identified as the Messiah,⁸⁹ riding backwards while lifting the sow's tail, another one is kneeling behind the sow, with the animal's excrement gushing into his eagerly opened mouth while in some renditions, the sow too is devouring a pile of excrement. This particularly disgusting motif of the Jews not only suckling the sow's milk but devouring its excrement, had been introduced by the woodcuts, its only possible forerunner being the *Judensau* at the east choir of St Sebald's church in Nuremberg (ca. 1380, see figure 6), where a Jew is collecting the sow's excrement in a bowl. Faeces were, by both scholarly and popular belief, the food of the devil,⁹⁰ thus establishing, or rather cementing, the demonization of the Jews that was further enhanced by the appearance of the goat in the background. The woodcuts, distributed via the new 'mass media' of leaflets and broadsheets that literally flooded the Holy Roman Empire in the Reformation period,⁹¹ are the single anti-Jewish joke, often accompanied by various texts which further emphasize the jokes that were made at the Jews' expense: at the bottom of the earliest of its renditions,⁹² it is explained that 'this is why we do not eat roast pork, and thus we are lustful and our breath stinks' (*umb daz wir nit essen swinin brotten, darumb sind wir gel und stinckt untz der oten*). One of the Jews is encouraging the Jew riding on the sow's back to suck its tail so as to uncover her rectum, while another one is calling the sow 'our mother': ample insinuations at the desire of the Jews to consume pork and to interact sexually with what is both a filthy animal and their mother.

While the Wittenberg *Judensau* developed more into a theological emblem due to the works of Luther and Fabricius and their discussion of the *Shem Hamphoras*,⁹³ the whole image of the Frankfurt *Judensau* is the epitome of topsy-turvyness that catered to the (even) broader masses: riding with your back to the head of the

who classifies twelve different, if overlapping, motifs that were presented on broadsheets (27–33). See also Winfried Frey and Andrea Frölich, *Das Judenbild in den Flugschriften des 16. Jahrhunderts* (Nordhausen: Bautz-Verlag, 2008, CD).

⁸⁹ Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb*, 174–75.

⁹⁰ Po-Chia Hsia, *The Myth of Ritual Murder*, 213–14, who points out Luther's writings about faeces and demonic pollution as well as popular stories such as Till Eulenspiegel, where Jews are tricked into buying a peasant's faeces as a rare medicament, thus exposing both the Jews' stupidity and their craving for 'wrong' food to ridicule.

⁹¹ Schöndorf, "Judenhaß und Toleranz," 27. The literature on the usage of broadsheets and pamphlets during the Reformation can, if only for a lack of space, not be discussed here. With a reference to the Jews, see apart from the otherwise quoted Rainer Wohlfeil, "Die Juden in der zeitgenössischen bildlichen Darstellung," *Reuchlin und die Juden*, ed. Arno Herzig and Julius H. Schoeps. Pforzheimer Reuchlinschriften, 3 (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1993), 21–36.

⁹² Shachar, *Judensau*, 34–35, pl. 30. See as a representative of the innumerable reproductions of this perhaps most famous woodcut the renditions by Heinz Schreckenberger, *Die Juden in der Kunst Europas: Ein historischer Bildatlas* (1996; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002), 345, and Wenzel, "Do worden die Judden alle geschant", 300, fig. 7.

⁹³ Shachar, *Judensau*, 43–51.

mount, a male devil who sports breasts, a female swine with a boar's fangs, faeces as edible food, adults suckling like infants—all this contributes to the general composition of the image which features inversion as a key element. Yet the clothes the Jews are dressed in remain realistic, everyday clothes any Jew (and non-Jew alike) of this time might be seen wearing on the street, and thus establish a link to normalcy and reality, enabling the spectator to draw a parallel to 'real-life' Jews, even their Jewish neighbours they would encounter during their every-day contact.⁹⁴ Furthermore, the contrast between the two scenes—the "martyrdom" of Simon of Trent and the *Judensau*—emphasizes the two antagonists, the (absolute) Pure and the (equally absolute) Impure, whereby the swine adds another detail of defamation: in the particular sphere of their lives where the Jews place the highest value on purity (in Christian observation), they are depicted as ultimately impure. They serve as an abstract model of all that is horrendous and rotten, and yet they are real; and thus, any insults, however violent and vile, and all painful mockery were legitimized by the most horrible crime the Jews were accused of having committed, the murdering of the—almost saintly—young child Simon.⁹⁵

The Frankfurt *Judensau* soon became the most popular type of *Judensau* to be used for leaflets and broadsheets up until the nineteenth century (see figure 7), supplanting the earlier ones. In its various renditions, it stood either alone or with other insulting depictions, or it accompanied, accentuated, or literally illustrated catchphrases, poems, or even longer texts, with the phrase *sauff du die milch friß du den dreck, das ist doch euer bestes geschleck* ('you guzzle down the milk and you devour the filth, this is after all your favorite dish') being the most popular one. Pigs and disgusting, murderous Jews are everywhere: in the early seventeenth-century broadsheet *Der Juden Synagog* ('The Jews' Synagogue),⁹⁶ the synagogue itself is a pigsty: pigs peep out of every possible window while Jews devote themselves to either criminal activities or studying their false and treacherous books. Surrounded by other derogatory symbols of Judaism like the Golden Calf, the Frankfurt *Judensau* makes up the center, forming the epitome of evil, filth, and perversion. Claudine Fabre-Vassas has pointed out the omnipresence of the pig not only in *Judensau* woodcuts—such as the badges of the Jews slaughtering Simon of Trent in a late fifteenth-century Italian engraving that have little pigs in their centers—playing on the image of the Jew as the cannibal butcher who performs on a human being what the Christians carry out around Easter, after a period of abstinence from eating pork during Lent: the slaughtering of the piglets they had

⁹⁴ The aspect of inversion has been pointed out by Gundula Grebner in her highly instructive article, "Die Judensaudarstellung am Frankfurter Brückentor als Schandbild," 93.

⁹⁵ Grebner, "Die Judensaudarstellung am Frankfurter Brückentor als Schandbild," 93–94.

⁹⁶ Shachar, *Judensau*, 57–58, pl. 49.

bred and raised at their homes,⁹⁷ spanning, if we want to follow her suggestion, the bridge all the way back to the cannibalistic hyenas and the mantichore of the Salisbury bestiary.⁹⁸

Both the broadsheets and *Judensau* sculptures of the Early Modern Period bring to light all the anti-Jewish elements that had been partially, if never completely, veiled by layers of metaphorical meanings during the Middle Ages. Yet although there is scarcely any *other* intention than anti-Jewish propaganda, the early modern *Judensäue* nevertheless consist of several components that cater to different stimuli: the Jews are marked as belonging to the sow, as a different, and lesser form of being, as offsprings of a beast to whom they turn when in need of nourishment; they are connected with obscenity and are branded as bordering on the sodomit, sporting shady sexual proclivities. Thus, the *Judensau* stresses the 'alien quality' of the Jews that allows the Christian hostility toward Jews to persist beyond the Middle Ages; it has contributed in transferring the primarily religious polemics and antagonism to a broader level, helping fix the stereotyped image in various cultural levels as verbal abuse, jokes, proverbs, and firmly establishing the distinct notion that Jews simply were 'another category of beings', a non-human life-form. At the end of the fifteenth century, the *Judensau* also made it on stage, adding yet another layer of mockery and crude humour, exploiting another means of drawing laughter at the expense of the Jews.⁹⁹

Hans Folz,¹⁰⁰ who had a considerable knowledge of talmudic scripture,¹⁰¹ accuses the Jews in his *die alt und neu ee* ("the old and the new marriage") verbatim of being "step-children of she-monkeys, jennies, and pigs" while a repentant Jew, shocked by the extent of his own blindness, sums up all the "misdeeds" of his faith: their descent from beasts, the envy and hatred they bear against all Christians, their idleness and gluttony, and the eventual result of these character

⁹⁷ Fabre-Vassas, *The Singular Beast*, 130–36, fig. 12–14. Hers is definitively a compelling study—the historian may criticize that some of the conclusions are based on evidence and source material too different in time and region, and that she falls for some 'medieval' myths that are, in fact, products of much later times, yet one cannot help but acknowledge the power of the sheer amount of symbols and metaphors she unveils.

⁹⁸ The connection ritual murder-cannibalism was also suggested by Georg R. Schoubek, "Zur Tradierung und Diffusion einer europäischen Aberglaubensvorstellung," *Die Legende vom Ritualmord*, 17–24; here 17–18, who points out that the accusation of ritual murder and its association with cannibalism can be found in many societies and religious communities as a derogatory incrimination of other religious groups.

⁹⁹ Still basic is Wenzel, "Do worden die Judden alle geschant".

¹⁰⁰ See recently Christine Magin, "Hans Folz und die Juden," *Einblattdrucke des 15. und frühen 16. Jahrhunderts: Probleme, Perspektiven, Fallstudien*, ed. Volker Honemann, Sabine Griesse, Falk Eisermann, and Marcus Ostermann (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2000), 371–95; and Winfried Frey, "The Intimate Other: Hans Folz' Dialogue between 'Christian and Jew,'" *Meeting the Foreign in the Middle Ages*, ed. Albrecht Classen (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), 249–67.

¹⁰¹ Wenzel, "Do worden die Judden alle geschant," 193–217.

traits: usury.¹⁰² In his later and most aggressively anti-Jewish *Spil vom Herzog von Burgund* ("Play of the Duke of Burgundy"), Folz even extends the catalogue of Jewish misdeeds, having the Antichrist, the fraudulent Jewish Messiah, reel off all the crimes "common" to Jews, from rapacious usury to ritual murders and murders committed by Jewish physicians. As in *Die alt und neu ee*, the effect is intensified by means of the self-accusation of the Jews. In the final scene of the *Spil*, the Christian characters call for the execution of the Jews, outdoing each other in sadistic and humiliating visions of torture, and the climax is reached when a sow is brought onto the stage and the Jews are forced by threats to lie down below the sow¹⁰³ — the sculptures and paintings were brought to life, providing a hilariously funny scene amidst the most cruel fantasies. Vicious humour and funny cruelty, both 'signature features' of not only late-medieval humor were united, with some obscenity as a topping to the deliciously venomous mix.

The knowledge among Christians of the Jewish dietary laws, particularly concerning the consumption of pork, cannot be doubted, and the association with the animal the Jews most kept away from, even abhorred, was already in its beginnings decidedly anti-Jewish, despite the contemporary use of the pig as an insult for Christians in Jewish polemics which the Christians were probably aware of. Unclean animals, with the inclusion of pigs, frequently functioned as metaphors for enemies in Jewish tradition: in the *Leviticus Rabbah*, written in fifth- or sixth-century Palestine, the pig symbolised Rome, along with other unclean animals that represented Babylon (camel), Media (badger), and Greece (hare)¹⁰⁴; both impure ones (meaning Christians) and swine 'lay in wait for Jewish blood' in a poem reflecting the horrendous persecutions during the first crusade.¹⁰⁵ The usage of pigs in Jewish texts was however not limited to non-Jews — apart from Pagans and Christians, also 'bad' Jews were linked to pigs,¹⁰⁶ a quite similar usage to the Christian tradition of equating Jews, pigs, and 'bad' Christians. An acquaintance of both Christians and Jews with the images used by the respective other can be safely assumed, and is sometimes put to use to secretly mock the

¹⁰² Wenzel, "Synagoga und Ecclesia," 76.

¹⁰³ Wenzel, "Do worden die Judden alle geschant," 252–54; eadem, "Synagoga und Ecclesia," 80–81; Po-Chia Hsia, *The Myth of Ritual Murder*, 63–64, with the connection to the host desecrations of Deggendorf and Passau that appear in many of Folz's plays and poems.

¹⁰⁴ Higgs Strickland, "The Jews, Leviticus, and the Unclean," 218 and 226–28 with a more than convincing linkage to the *Judensau*; Cuffel, *Gendering Disgust*, 52–53.

¹⁰⁵ Cuffel, *Gendering Disgust*, 144.

¹⁰⁶ Cuffel, *Gendering Disgust*, 43–45.

adversary,¹⁰⁷ but it is crucial to stress that although these insults might have been drawn 'from a common set of symbols,' they did not carry the same meaning to either of the groups.¹⁰⁸

Yet however obvious the mocking intention of equating Jews with their 'negative counterpart' in medieval art may have been, the reduction to and focussing on the derogatory purpose from the late fourteenth century onwards gave rise to other, more distinct ways of presenting the insult. Not only were the Jews depicted as offspring of the sow and therefore being fed by it, their 'real-life abstinence' from eating its meat was exploited to supplement the insult with a further, virtually inverse layer: although the Jews 'officially' claim that they do not eat pork they in fact secretly lust for it. Particularly in *Judensau* broadsheets, where explanatory captions comment on the ongoing scene, the Jews are exposed to mockery also because they lust for what they may not have: but instinct-driven beings as they are, they are eventually unable to suppress their greed, an idea that is reflected in the abovementioned caption of the Frankfurt *Judensau* that refers to the 'favorite dish' of the Jews.

In the translation of the *Judensau* on the stages of the fifteenth-century theater, this motif is expressed verbatim: Hans Folz, in his *Der Juden und der Christen streit vor kaiser Constantinus*, a mock-version of the earlier disputations of *Ecclesia* and *Synagoga*,¹⁰⁹ ultimately states that it wasn't for the theological arguments of the Christian that the Jews saw reason and asked for baptism but for their irrepressible craving for pork sausages—yet, as soon as the Jews will eat them, they will "turn into different kinds of sausages", indicating that everything the Jews touch turns into something foul.¹¹⁰ The laughter these scenes evoked was, as Edith Wenzel has

¹⁰⁷ The quite common image of dogs (Christians) hunting after rabbits (Jews) was turned upside down in an illumination of the famous Kaufmann Haggadah (Spain, fourteenth century, now Ms. A 422 of the Kaufmann Collection in the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Science, Budapest), where rabbits are putting a dog to flight, see Alexander (Sándor) Scheiber, *The Kaufmann Haggadah*. Publications of the Oriental Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, 1 (Budapest: Publishing House of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, 1957), 55, see also Gabrielle Sed-Rajna, *The Kaufmann Haggadah* (Budapest: Kultural International, 1990).

¹⁰⁸ Cuffel, *Gendering Disgust*, 15 (with the inclusion of Muslims); see also Lipton, *Images of Intolerance*, 141 ('similarity of the form in no way entails the identity of meaning').

¹⁰⁹ Another of Folz' dialogues between a Christian and a Jew has been examined by Frey, "The Intimate Other."

¹¹⁰ Winfried Frey, "Antijüdische Tendenzen in einem Fastnachtspiel des Hans Folz. Einige Aspekte zum Unterrichtsthema 'Antisemitismus'," *Wirkendes Wort* 32.1 (1982): 1–19; here 13–14; Wenzel, "Synagoga und Ecclesia," 72–73. It might seem quite a stretch but one cannot help being reminded of the numerous market regulations that forbade Jews touching meat that was laid out for sale, see e.g., for France Lipton, *Images of Intolerance*, 68–69, for Aragon David Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence: Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 169–72, for Austria Birgit Wiedl, "Jews and the City. Parameters of Jewish Urban Life in Late Medieval Austria," *Urban Space in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Age*, ed. Albrecht Classen.

pointed out, springing rather from relishing in humiliating the enemy than from having prevailed in a battle of wits, while combining it with the delight in scatological humour so typical of the *Fastnachtsspiele* (Shrovetide Plays).¹¹¹

Jews lusting after, eating, or at least trying to eat pork remained a central element of anti-Jewish and anti-Semitic propaganda; in the German-speaking area, the image prevailed in print, literature, and every-day language, the term *Judensau* developing into one of the most common verbal insults toward Jews.¹¹² Yet the impact of the *Judensau*, or, rather Jew-with-sow image, went far beyond its geographical scope. English caricatures of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries thematise the attempted emancipation and assimilation of the English Jews by usage of this very image: in demonstrating their emancipation, Jews start to eat pork, pointedly enjoying it, but 'get it wrong' by eating the wrong parts or trying to eat it alive—reflecting yet again the association with cannibalism—or kissing, in their enthusiasm, the still living swine and thus repeating the old motif with the connection of obscenity, sexual deviances, and sodomitic tendencies. To further stress their alienness, the Jews of a nineteenth-century caricature speak with a heavy German accent while bystanders laugh at the obvious vainness of their attempts at being naturalized.¹¹³

The nineteenth-century English caricature has at its bottom what had developed into a main target of mockery during the late Middle Ages and the early modern period: a caption of (often fake) Hebrew that accompanied *Judensau* woodcuts¹¹⁴ or was shown to the audience during passion plays (also in contrast to the Roman INRI).¹¹⁵ The Jews' language was ridiculed, presented as some sort of gibberish no rational human would want to speak; at the same time, the 'ominous' quality of their language was pointed out, hinting at a clandestine and most likely hostile communication that was taking place between the Jews, both local and foreign.¹¹⁶

Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture, 4 (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2009), 273–308; here 297–99 and ead., "Codifying Jews: Jews in Austrian Town Charters of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries," *The Constructed Jew: Jews and Judaism through Medieval Christian Eyes*, ed. Merrall L. Price and Kristine T. Utterback (Turnhout: Brepols, forthcoming in 2010).

¹¹¹ Wenzel, "Synagoga und Ecclesia," 73.

¹¹² It is a sad fact that up until today, the equation of Jews with swine is a common means of anti-Semitic propaganda launched by right-wing circles, the example of a pig with a painted-on Star of David and the name of Ignatz Bubis on its back that was herded across Alexanderplatz, Berlin, in 1998 by a group of neo-Nazis (Berliner Zeitung, 9 November, 1998), may serve as one among, unfortunately, all too many examples. See also *Bilder der Judenfeindschaft. Antisemitismus, Vorurteile und Mythen*, ed. Julius H. Schoeps and Joachim Schlör (Augsburg: Bechtermünz, 1999).

¹¹³ Shachar, *Judensau*, fig. 58a, 59ab and 60ab.

¹¹⁴ Shachar, *Judensau*, 34.

¹¹⁵ Heil, 'Gottesfeinde' — 'Menschenfeinde', 173–74.

¹¹⁶ Heil, 'Gottesfeinde' — 'Menschenfeinde', 174. See also Mellinkoff, *Outcasts*, 63 (on the connection Jews-sorcery), 95–110.

Ecclesiastical art, never reluctant to use genuine Hebrew lettering, seized on this trend, perhaps the most famous example being the sixteenth-century altarpiece of St Anthony's church at Isenheim, painted by Mathias Grünewald and now on display at the Unterlinden Museum in Colmar,¹¹⁷ that features a chamber pot with a 'Hebrew' inscription, mocking the language and once again stressing the linking of Jews with excrement.¹¹⁸

Despite the ongoing reduction of the imagery to the merely insulting, it is obvious that the connection Jews–pigs–*gula* was neither forgotten nor reduced to depictions of the *Judensau*. The connotation with usury, which the medieval depictions had partially expressed more subtly, was established firmly in the course of the seventeenth century: a money pouch that is dangling off the belt of the Jew kneeling behind the sow was added to some of the renditions of the Frankfurt *Judensau*, making sure that no one missed the connection.¹¹⁹ Hans Folz' *Die alt und neu ee*, to name but one literary example, unmasks the Jews as embodiment of *gula* and *luxuria* at the end,¹²⁰ while aspects of the metaphorical language of Hieronymus Bosch (who can, though, not be accused of using simple imagery) show that also late fifteenth-century artists would still put this imagery to good and effective use. Although no Jews are present in person in the two paintings that make up the left wing of the reconstructed 'New Triptych' (*Ship of Fools* and *Gula*) and cover several more or less deadly sins, from drinking and unchaste love to selfishness and sloth, not only the exemplified vices are those most conventionally associated with Jews, but there are a number of symbols that point toward the Jews. Most interesting in the present context is the pig's trotter in the heraldic standard of the tent that houses the two unchaste lovers: not only do pigs' trotters 'always crop up in Bosch's work wherever gluttony or impending poverty are concerned', the association of pigs and Jews definitely exceeds the mere connotation with the depicted vice(s).¹²¹

In the course of the early modern period, particularly enhanced during the Reformation, with Catholics and Protestants of various persuasions attacking each

¹¹⁷ Reiner Marquard, *Mathias Grünewald und der Isenheimer Altar. Erläuterungen—Erwägungen—Deutungen*. Mit einem Geleitwort von Pantxika Béguerie, Musée d'Unterlinden (Colmar and Stuttgart: Calwer 1996).

¹¹⁸ Mellinkoff, *The Devil at Isenheim*, 61, with linkage to the *Judensau* 65–68, and figure 36, and several mentions of the topic in *Outcasts*; Mentgen, *Juden im Elsass*, 453. See also Lipton, *Images of Intolerance*, 36, on the connection filth/excrement—money; on the usage of Hebrew in woodcuts, see Schöner, *Judenbilder*, 259–62.

¹¹⁹ Shachar, *Judensau*, pl. 41a and 41c, pointed out by Grebner, "Die Judensaudarstellung am Frankfurter Brückentor als Schandbild," 92. See also Higgs Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, & Jews*, 140–43, on the medieval motif, with further literature.

¹²⁰ Wenzel, "Do worden die Judden alle geschant", 217.

¹²¹ Hartau, "Bosch and the Jews," 33–35, fig. 1 and 2.

other by use of arguments borrowed from the anti-Jewish arsenal,¹²² and the rapidly increasing use of print media, other defamatory anti-Jewish images evolve along with and in interaction with the *Judensau* while the *Judensau* manages to not only intrude into the lay sphere but to eventually advance into the inside of the Christians' houses. Objects of the daily routine, like playing cards,¹²³ featured the image of the *Judensau*, allowing it to become an integral part of everyday life—and, presumably, of daily jokes. Other motifs, like the depiction of one or more persons riding with their back turned to the head of their mount, were adapted by and at the same time influenced by the *Judensau* complex. The *Sauritt* ('sow-ride', also *Eselsritt*, ass-ride, rarely with dogs or horses) is the typical feature of a type of pamphlet that is known as *Schandbild* or *Schmähbrief* ('defamatory picture/letter') that evolves into a central means of punishment in the context of the *Ehrenstrafen* (shame sanction) and is utilised by groups and individuals of various social standing and intention.¹²⁴ Generally, these defamatory pictures show the person(s) they are directed against as riding backwards; if groups of people are depicted, they might also engage in the 'typical' habit of occupying themselves with the animal's behind, shoving seals or money pouches into its hindquarters, or devouring its excrement.¹²⁵ As an illustration to Luther's pamphlet of 1545, *Against the Roman Papacy founded by the devil* with its vituperations of Paul III,¹²⁶ the pope himself was shown riding the back of a sow—a woodcut that stands in a tradition of defamatory images against the pope (*Papstspottbilder*) that showed the pope (Clement IV) in full regalia who is wielding a sword, about to behead the Holy Roman Emperor (Conrad III, *The Pope's Threat*), or being himself hanged from the gallows along with his 'satanic' cardinals while demons take their souls;¹²⁷ images quite unrelated to any Jewish aspects. On the other hand, the merger of human and beast into an equally horrid and hilarious, even pathetic, creature was an essential element of both political and religious polemics. Creatures like the

¹²² On the complex 'relationship' of laughter and religion in the context of the reformation, see Auffarth, "Alle Tage Karneval?," who addresses the issue of laughter as a long-existent tool in religious practice and ritual, 82–85. See also Amishai-Maisels, "Demonization of the 'Other' in the Visual Arts," 54, on the repertoire of demon-like features (horns, claws, tails, flames, monstrous facial and/or bodily features) and its (almost world-wide) usage up until the twenty-first century.

¹²³ Rohrbacher and Schmidt, *Judenbilder*, 162 (illustration).

¹²⁴ Matthias Lentz, *Konflikt, Ehre, Ordnung: Untersuchungen zu den Schmähbriefen und Schandbildern des späten Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit (ca. 1350 bis 1600). Mit einem illustrierten Katalog der Überlieferung*. Veröffentlichungen der Historischen Kommission für Niedersachsen und Bremen, 217 (Hanover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 2004), who, unfortunately, does not address the parallels in the metaphorical image between the *Schmähbriefe* and the *Judensau*.

¹²⁵ Lentz, *Konflikt, Ehre, Ordnung*, 357–58.

¹²⁶ Kurt Stadtwald, *Roman Popes and German Patriots: Antipapalism in the Politics of the German Humanist Movement from Gregor Heimburg to Martin Luther* (Geneva: Librairie Droz S.A., 1996), 26.

¹²⁷ Stadtwald, *Roman Popes and German Patriots*, 199–205.

Papstesel ('Pope-donkey') and the *Mönchskalb* ('monk-calf'), two 'only recently discovered horrid monsters' whose existence and appearance was brought to the attention of a wider audience by broadsheets, provoked both horror and laughter, whereby these emotional reactions were not mutually exclusive but could be experienced simultaneously.¹²⁸ Yet there is a difference to be detected between the human-beast hybrids, however commonly used,¹²⁹ and the sow-riding: like the *Schmähbriefe*, the sow-riding pope not only translated an already well-established image into a new setting that only "worked" because people were already socially conditioned to react properly to the primary stimulus,¹³⁰ but played with an image that would at least with a part of the audience evoke other, and definitely non-papal, associations: unlike the beast-human hybrids, the sow-with-human image was quite firmly linked to one specific group—the Jews.

From the sixteenth century onwards, with the many variations of the *Judensau* spread by use of printed matters, the *Judensau* was often no longer standing alone but being surrounded by other, equally derogatory symbols. While the Frankfurt *Judensau* is in many of its renditions accompanied by a woman leading the symbol of the devil par excellence, a he-goat,¹³¹ the viciously anti-Jewish text of the leaflet *Der Juden Erbarkeit* ("On the Jews' respectability", 1571) was illustrated by a woodcut on the front cover that shows three grotesque, barely human-shaped figures: two creatures featuring devilish symbols like hooves and talons, horns and antlers, long snouts and pointed ears. Their cloaks, however, bear a circle-shaped emblem that is easily recognisable as the infamous yellow badge that had become widely accepted as a derogative distinctive feature for Jewishness throughout

¹²⁸ Philipp Melanchton and Martin Luther emphasized in their accompanying explanation of Lucas Cranach the Elder's woodcuts the beastliness of these creatures and the threat they (and what they allegorically represented) posed, thus triggering or at last fuelling a more fearful reaction; Bianca Frohne has however rightly pointed out that both the intention of the broadsheet and the reaction(s) it provoked encompassed more than fearful and disgusted emotions, and emphasizes the satirical, grotesque, and comical character of these hybrid creatures, see Frohne, "Narren, Tiere und gewrichte Figuren," 19–22 and 47–49, and fig. 1 and 2.

¹²⁹ For the 'master' of these human-beast-demon hybrids and their equally terrifying and ridiculing purpose, Hieronymus Bosch, see lately and with regard to this aspect Guido Boulboulé, "Groteske Angst. Die Höllenphantasien des Hieronymus Bosch," *Glaubensstreit und Gelächter*, 55–78, particularly 67–68. See also Amishai-Maisels, "Demonization of the 'Other' in the Visual Arts," 54, on the depiction of Muslims with the heads of animals.

¹³⁰ Heil, 'Gottesfeinde'—'Menschenfeinde', 151; on the similarities of Catholic reproaches against heretics, witches, and Jews; on the—much discussed—linkage of Jews and heretics, see Lipton, *Images of Intolerance*, chapter 4 (83–111).

¹³¹ See Po-Chia Hsia, *The Myth of Ritual Murder*, 213–15, with figure 14 (rendition of the Frankfurt *Judensau*), on the demonization of Jews by use of *Judensau* and goat.

Europe,¹³² complementing and partially replacing the Jewish hat. The third creature to their right, with the same smaller hooves and talons, is riding on the back of a sow and playing some sort of bagpipe while the sow is devouring a pile of excrement.¹³³ Whereas the sow remains primarily connotated with the Jews, the only 'rival' to the swine, the he-goat with its equally strong connection with dirt and filth, and the even stronger allusions of the devil, serves even more comprehensive purposes, as a frequent companion of witches and sorcerers, to name but one example. The illumination however in the thirteenth-century *Bible moralisée* that shows Jews kissing a he-goat's anus¹³⁴ and the fifteenth-century capital in a Flemish church that features a Jew on the back of a he-goat¹³⁵ might be centuries apart and were meant for audiences rather different in number and status, yet the imagery is similar in its intent. The *Synagoga* statue at Erfurt holds a goat-head, goats appear as mounts of *Synagoga*, and during the Early Modern Period, the goat with its lascivious character and incessant sexual desire, its stubbornness and its horns became almost as popular and widespread as the *Judensau* when it appeared on various defamatory pamphlets.¹³⁶ Like the *Judensau* of this time, it combined images deriving from the anti-Jewish arsenal with images that were generally used in a defamatory context: goat-riders, in particular the *Ellenritter* or *Ellenreiter* (literally cubit-knight or cubit-rider), a tailor riding a he-

¹³² Earlier in Western Europe: In both Ashkenzaic England and Sephardic Spain, yellow was a "sign" of Jews as early as the early 13th century; in 1269 and 1274, the kings of France and England respectively decreed that Jews had to wear a yellow badge on their clothing (Blumenkranz, *Juden und Judentum*, 23–24, fig. 14 and 15 that show examples from early 14th century Florence and France, respectively), while in the realm of the Holy Roman Empire, the badge wasn't generally implemented as a sign before the 15th century (first mention is 1294 in Erfurt, where the Jewish community obtained the permission to not wear the badge which had officially been implemented two years earlier, *Germania Judaica* I, 216).

¹³³ Winfried Frey has pointed out that in the copy of this leaflet that is kept in the Bavarian State Library in Munich (Bayerische Staatsbibliothek München), there's another defamatory text added to the pamphlet listing (again) anti-Jewish resentments which, among others, express the author's wish that the Jews 'may be hanged like dogs'. Frey, "Vergleiche von Juden mit Hunden," 131.

¹³⁴ The manuscript was made in the 1220s for the king of France; the context in which the illumination is placed—the worship of the golden calf which is also illustrated in the roundel above, the Jew holding the goat carries a moneybag—firmly establishes the connection avarice-worship of the devil-Jews; many of the images refer in some way to moneylending. Another roundel in the codex shows a Jew kissing the anus of a cat; Lipton, *Images of Intolerance*, 1 (dating), 42–43, with fig. 26, 49, with fig. 32, 50–51.

¹³⁵ Josuah Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews: The Medieval Concept of the Jew and Its Relation to Modern Antisemitism* (1943; New York: Jewish Publication Society, 2001), 45.

¹³⁶ Hassig, "Sex in the Bestiaries," 72.

goat,¹³⁷ were an image that was often used in a mocking context up until the nineteenth century in both visual art and literature.¹³⁸

In the context of anti-Jewish mockery and defamation, the goad-riding takes on a particular development that features striking parallels to the *Judensau*: The “traditional” medieval pairing of the allegorical embodiments of *Ecclesia* and *Synagoga*,¹³⁹ adorning as sculptures many a Romanesque and Gothic church in the shape of two beautiful female figures¹⁴⁰ and discussing their respective postulates in various dialogues, developed into a derogatory image of a barely human *Synagoga* riding a he-goat and an open dispute that not only ended in favour of *Ecclesia* but with a crushing defeat of *Synagoga*, often accompanied by violent insults. Whereas the dialogues were like the early *Judensau* statues and the bestiaries limited to a specific group of readers/viewers both in regard to the accessibility of the objects and to the level of education of the ‘consumers,’¹⁴¹ both the vituperations that became a typical part of preludes to passion plays¹⁴² and the imaginary that developed more and more into a broad joke were meant for a broader public.

¹³⁷ Rohrbacher and Schmidt, *Judenbilder*, 161.

¹³⁸ In one of the stories that the nineteenth century constructed around the historical figure of Appollonius von Gailingen, a fourteenth-century “robber-knight” in Franconia, he calls the wealthy merchants of a town “*Käsewürmer, Ellenreiter und Pfeffersäcke*” (cheese-worms, cubit-riders, and pepper-bags).

¹³⁹ See the overview by Wolfgang Greisenegger, “*Ecclesia und Synagoge*” *Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie*, vol. 1 (rpt. 1968; Freiburg: Herder, 1994), col. 569–78, and Jochum, “*Ecclesia und Synagoga*,” 248–51.

¹⁴⁰ There has been much discussion about the broad variety of meanings these statues conveyed to the contemporaries, with newer works stressing the intrinsic stage-character of these statues that would cause an entire scene to reel off in the minds of the spectators, impressively “re-enacted” by Helga Scirie, “*Ecclesia und Synagoge an den Domen zu Straßburg, Bamberg, Magdeburg und Erfurt. Körpersprachliche Wandlungen im gestalterischen Kontext*,” *Wiener Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte* XLVI/XLVII: *Beiträge zur mittelalterlichen Kunst*, vol. 2 (1993/94): 679–88, 871–74 (illustrations); here 684–85, on the basis of the statues of Erfurt and Strasbourg, see also Weber, “*Glaube und Wissen*,” and Elizabeth Monroe, “‘Fair and Friendly, Sweet and Beautiful’: Hopes for Jewish Conversion in Synagoga’s Song of Songs Imagery,” *Beyond the Yellow Badge*, 33–61, for a more positive image of *Synagoga*.

¹⁴¹ Weber, “*Glaube und Wissen*,” 94 (education), 96 (accessibility).

¹⁴² Edith Wenzel, “*Synagoga und Ecclesia—Zum Antijudaismus im deutschsprachigen Spiel des späten Mittelalters*,” *Internationales Archiv für Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur* 12 (1987): 57–81; here 66–69.

The fourteenth-century carvings¹⁴³ at the choir stall of the cathedral of Erfurt shows a quite untypical *Judensau*, a mixture of *Judensau* and *Synagoga* in fact, that is part a “Battle of faiths” in which *Ecclesia* is jousting in quite chivalric a manner against *Synagoga*.¹⁴⁴ The carvings show the moment of defeat; *Ecclesia* is about to drive the tip of her lance into *Synagoga*’s throat while *Synagoga* is rendered defenceless. Not only does she have neither shield nor weapon to protect herself with, she is clearly marked inferior because of her mount—and here is where the ridiculous element is tied in: while *Ecclesia* is riding a horse in knightly fashion, *Synagoga* has to make do with a sow.¹⁴⁵ It might well be that the (exaggeratedly) large teats of the sow reminded spectators of other “pairings” of Jews with sows they had come across, thus deriding the Jews not only in an allegorical sense, as ending up on the losing side of the battle of faiths, but as those who drink a beast’s milk, obviously being only half-humans themselves.

The quite frequent inclusion of the *Synagoga* sculpture into the row of the Foolish Virgins might have eluded in its deeper theological meanings the average by-goer, yet they would nevertheless grin at the Foolish Virgins, with their often grotesque grimacing, and thusly at *Synagoga* who stands in their line, marked as foolish, lacking prudence, and therefore being, with no one to blame but herself.¹⁴⁶ With the emergence of what is referred to as *Lebendes Kreuz* (‘Living Cross’),¹⁴⁷ a type of depiction to be found almost exclusively in book illuminations and wall paintings from the fifteenth century onwards in Central Europe, *Synagoga* takes on a completely different shape: blindfolded as usual, yet no longer bearing herself regally but with attributes that are meant to evoke both laughter and disgust in the spectators: she is riding an ass or (less often) a goat, that is in some cases already

¹⁴³ The dating of early 15th century (thusly Shachar, *Judensau*, pl. 28) has been corrected by means of dendrochronological examination carried out in 2002 that placed the felling of the trees used for the stalls in the years 1329 and 1364/65, the time of the second expansion of the choir, see Rainer Müller and Thomas Nitz, *Forschungen zum Dom Erfurt. Das Chorgestühl des Erfurter Domes*, 2 vols. Arbeitsheft des Thüringischen Vereins für Denkmalpflege, N.F. 20.1 (2003; Altenburg: Verlag Reinhold, 2005).

¹⁴⁴ The Cathedral also hosts a “classical” pairing of *Ecclesia*/*Synagoga* statues at the jamb of the main entrance portal in the context of the Ten Virgins.

¹⁴⁵ Illustration: Shachar, *Judensau*, pl. 28.

¹⁴⁶ Scurie, “*Ecclesia und Synagoge*,” 683.

¹⁴⁷ Old but still essential is Robert L. Füglistner, *Das Lebende Kreuz. Ikonographisch-ikonologische Untersuchung der Herkunft und Entwicklung einer spätmittelalterlichen Bildidee und ihrer Verwurzelung im Wort* (Einsiedeln, Zurich, and Cologne: Benzinger Verlag, 1964). Most of the images share a quite homogenous setup: In the center, there is Golgatha, with Christ on the cross, and above the joist, God himself appears—in various shapes—with a blessing gestus. Typical are the two female figures that approach the cross—to the left, there is *Ecclesia* with her crown, riding a tetramorph that symbolizes the four Evangelists, she carries the chalice to collect Christ’s blood and the lance with His symbol. To the right is the above described *Synagoga*, who is sometimes paired with Eve while Mary stands at *Ecclesia*’s side.

dying, she not only holds on to a broken lance but carries a goat's head with her. It is quite evident that her own posture as well as the situation she is in is designed not only to degrade but decry, but the most striking—and telling—difference is the sword that comes thrusting down from the joist: the old statues of Strasbourg and Bamberg might have shown a *Synagoga* that had been defeated, that was blind and submissively lowering her head, yet a *Synagoga* that was still alive, whereas in the Living Cross the distinctive feature is that she is being killed, pierced by the sword.¹⁴⁸ Like the *Judensau*, the *Synagoga* in the context of the Living Cross is a figure that is to be laughed at—more on the pathetic, even deplorable side than the *Judensau*, yet the metaphorical language shows many parallels: the usage of filthy animals—swine, goat, ass—and the close connection that is established between the *Synagoga*/Jews and those soiled creatures, the riding with one's back to the animal's head (although seldomly used in the Living Cross), and the general exclusion from the human world.

The question remains how to deal with the remaining *Judensäue* that are still present in- and outside medieval and early modern buildings. Some have been removed in earlier times, like the one at the Town Hall of Salzburg which was taken down by command of the Archbishop in 1785, or have weathered away, like the barely recognisable sculpture at the parish church of Bayreuth. Some have been removed 'by accident,' like the Frankfurt *Judensau* that was, despite the pleas of the Jewish community of Frankfurt from as early as 1609 onwards,¹⁴⁹ torn down along with the *Brückenturm* in 1801, albeit surviving in its manifold versions on broadsheets and pamphlets.

During the last decades, some have been taken down, like the ones in Wiener Neustadt and Bad Wimpfen that are now on display in the respective municipal museums. Up until today, though, many sculptures still are where they had been placed centuries ago, in plain sight. At some places, plaques have been attached to or in close vicinity of the respective *Judensau*, explaining the meaning and historical context of the sculpture, albeit in varying degrees of distancing: while the Wittenberg (mounted 1988) and Bayreuth (2005) point to guilt and responsibility of the church, the plaque at Regensburg (2005) merely speaks of 'a document that is to be seen in the context of its time, and will seem strange to us today.' In Nuremberg, for instance, a recent comment on the church's website (www.sebalduskirche.de, 2005) and a flyer that is being distributed inside the

¹⁴⁸ A particularly impressive example (although not the only one) is the Minster of Freiburg that has both a pairing of *Ecclesia* and *Synagoga* sculptures and (as stained-glass windows) a Living Cross, from the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries, respectively, see Heike Mittmann, *Die Glasfenster des Freiburger Münsters*. Großer Kunstführer Schnell & Steiner, 219 (Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 2005).

¹⁴⁹ Po-Chia Hsia, *The Myth of Ritual Murder*, 210–11.

church bear both explanation and apology; and artists like Wolfram Kastner (www.christliche-sauerei.de) have alerted both authorities and general public to the problem, drawing both positive and negative reactions, and even the German Pig Museum (www.deutsches-schweinemuseum.de) has devoted a small part of its 2004 exhibition to the *Judensau*.

Many sculptures, however, still remain uncommented, continuing to stand amidst other testaments of medieval humor, yet both their existence and the negligent, even indifferent handling of that fact are indeed no matter to laugh about.



Figure 1: Bamberg, cloister of the Carmelite monastery: corbel with a Jew-beast hybrid, fourteenth century (photo: @Birgit Wiedl)



Figure 2: Regensburg Cathedral, sculpture of a *Judensau* on a buttress on the south wall of the Cathedral, around 1330 (from wikipedia.de, public domain)



Figure 3: Broadsheet showing the Wittenberg *Judensau*, Wolfgang Meissner 1596. The rendition features the common addition of a second, smaller *Judensau* to the left, while the suckling Jews have badges on their backs (from wikipedia.de, public domain)

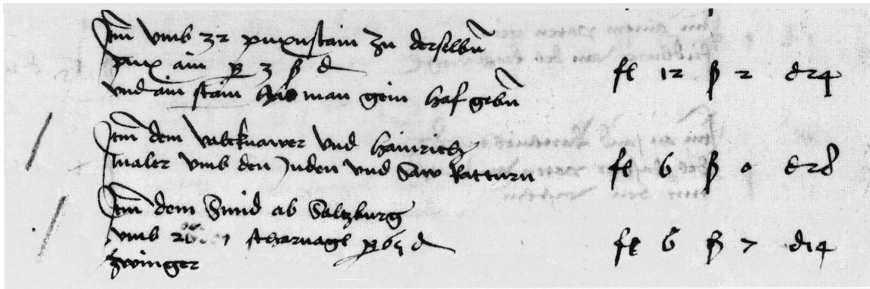


Figure 4: Entry to the account book of the Salzburg Mayor Hans Glavenberger, 1487, billing the costs for the *Judensau* on the tower of the town hall (Municipal Archives of Salzburg, BU 264)

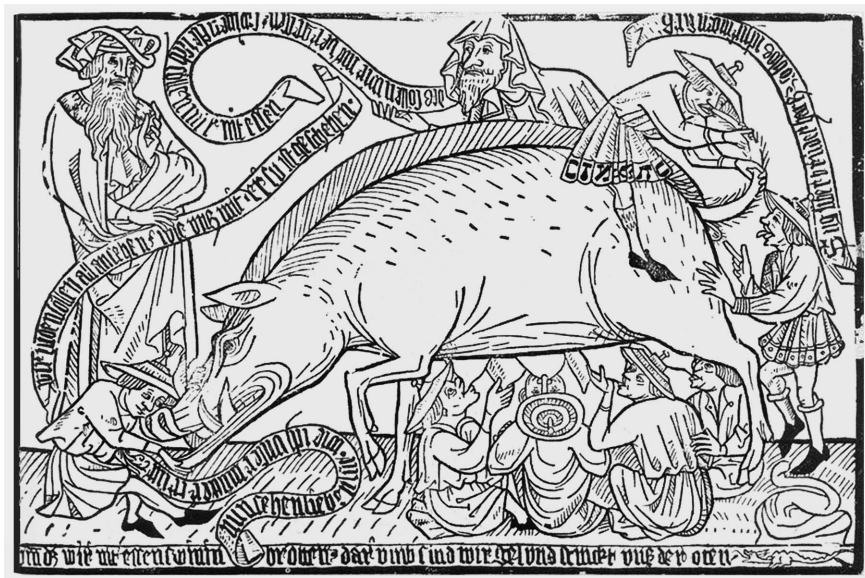


Figure 5: *Judensau*. Woodcut, Germany, from a fifteenth-century block (first printed in 1472) (from wikipedia.de, public domain)



Figure 6: Nuremberg, St Sebaldus, sculpture of a *Judensau* on a buttress at the east choir, around 1380 (Bildarchiv Hans-Christoph Dittscheid)

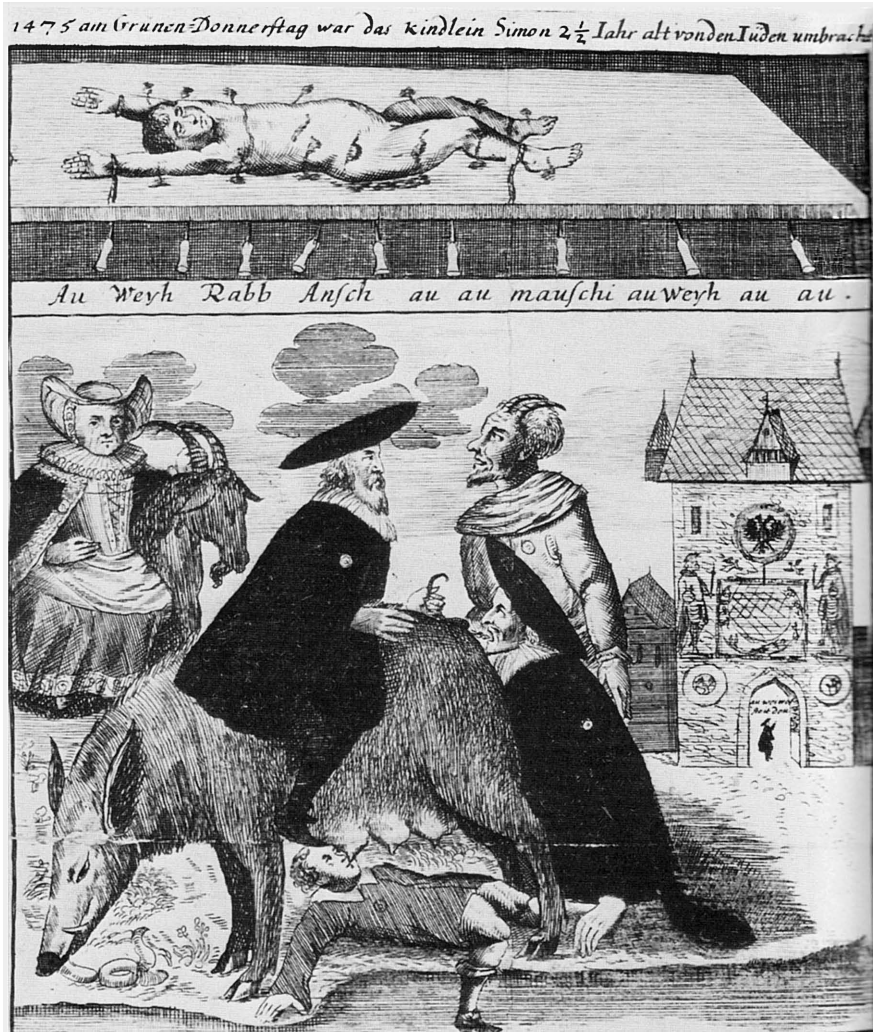


Figure 7: Eighteenth-century broadsheet showing the Frankfurt *Judensau*, with the typical additions of Simon of Trent above the *Judensau*, and a woman with a he-goat, a horned devil, and the Old Bridge Tower as background. The line above the *Judensau* reads: "Au weyh Rabb Ansch au au mauschi au weyh au au" and is in many renditions followed by the 'invitation' to 'guzzle down the milk and devour the filth' (from wikipedia.de, public domain)

Chapter 10

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Yes . . . but was it funny? Cecco Angiolieri, Rustico Filippi, and Giovanni Boccaccio

Among Italian readership, the Sienese poet Cecco Angiolieri (ca. 1260–1312) is perhaps the most famous author of comic poetry of medieval literature. The composer of some 111 sonnets, Angiolieri explored the range of the poetry of reprehension, expressing hatred for his father, satirizing love literature, and making seemingly autobiographical statements about his impoverished conditions.¹ He engaged in satirical exchanges, called *tenzoni*, with the author of the *Divine Comedy*, Dante Alighieri, although Dante's contributions have not survived. Angiolieri's verse also inspired numerous writers for decades after his death. The impact of Angiolieri's verse on literary culture endured for such a long time that people imitated his poems even until the first half of the fifteenth century.

Angiolieri was probably the most influential satiric poet, but he was not the first. It is impossible to say, of course, who exactly invented Italian satiric verse, but perhaps the earliest to explore its artistic possibilities was the Florentine Rustico Filippi (ca. 1230–ca. 1299). A famous poet of the time, Brunetto Latini, credited Filippi with the development of comic verse² although others had dabbled in it before him.³ Filippi, in contrast to them, excelled at it. Of the generation just preceding Angiolieri, Filippi composed some 59 sonnets, of which just over half,

¹ Cecco Angiolieri and Rustico Filippi are both cited from *Poeti giocosi del tempo di Dante*, ed. Mario Marti (Milan: Rizzoli, 1956).

² Maurizio Vitale, *Rimatori comico-realistici del Due e Trecento* (Turin: UTET, 1956), 103. See Nicolino Applauso's contribution to this volume for an analysis of Rustico Filippi's political verse.

³ Authors who tried out the comic style prior to Filippi include the Sicilian Cielo d'Alcamo, the Tuscan Guittone d'Arezzo, and possibly the Bolognese Guido Guinizzelli.

that is, 30, are comic. His comic corpus consists of caricatures of fellow citizens, political opponents and, notably, women of the Florentine Commune. Following a tradition harking back to late antiquity and the time of the Church Fathers, he denigrated women by exposing their sexual misdeeds, often in exceedingly blunt language. A critical writing about Filippi, composed in the early fourteenth century, associates him with the topos of misogynistic slander, *vituperatio in foeminas*, and contrasts him to the laudatory love poetry so prevalent in Italy at the time. The relevant portion reads:

Quid enim Rusticus barbatus et alij quidam, laudis ex vituperiis per eos impintis contra dominas reportarunt[:] vedeant quot et qui eorum super hiis scripta honorant (v. 1).⁴

[How is it that Rustico Barbuto (Filippi's nickname) and certain others get praises from the slanders they imposed upon women; let them see how many—and who—honor their writings beyond themselves.]

It is difficult to determine if Filippi influenced Angiolieri or if they both developed their notions of comic poetry from earlier sources.⁵ For the purposes of this paper I will limit the discussion of comic verse to Angiolieri and Filippi, although numerous others at the time also composed it. I intend to discuss them as representatives of their style in the hopes of understanding the typical reaction to their verse. I want to address the question of whether they intended their lyrics as humorous; specifically, I will examine one important document of Italian literature to explore the question of whether they considered their poetry to be funny. In short, did Cecco Angiolieri, Rustico Filippi, and their comrades mean for their readers to laugh?

This is not a new question, nor is it a simple one. When the critical tradition on Angiolieri began in the late nineteenth century, a fierce debate ensued around the following question: did Angiolieri make outrageous statements for humorous reasons, or was he simply a disreputable individual speaking honestly about himself? Angiolieri was probably the most famous of the medieval comic poets, who even entered into modern popular culture and, hence, the consciousness of everyday Italians. In the early decades of the twentieth century, some of the debates about Angiolieri took place in the pages of magazines for general readership, not specialized journals, and several works of popular literature featured Angiolieri as the protagonist.⁶ Therefore, conclusions drawn about

⁴ The commentator of Francesco da Barberino is cited from Francesco da Barberino, *I documenti d'amore*, ed. Francesco Egidi (Milan: Arché, 1982), 90–91. The translation is mine.

⁵ Giorgio Petrocchi, "I poeti realisti," in *Storia della letteratura italiana*, vol. 1, *Le origini e il Duecento*, ed. Emilio Cecchi and Natalino Sapegno (Milan: Garzanti, 1965), 689–725; here 699.

⁶ See, for instance, Edmondo Rho's article, "Cecco Angiolieri," *Civiltà moderna* 3 (1931): 499–512. Examples of popular literature about Angiolieri include the play *Il beffardo: Fresco drammatico*

Angiolieri were subsequently applied to other such authors; how one viewed comic literature often depended upon how one viewed Angiolieri.

The earliest contemporary scholar of Cecco Angiolieri, Alessandro D'Ancona, called the poet a humorist, explaining that Angiolieri composed his works to be declaimed in the taverns.⁷ In his characterization of Angiolieri, D'Ancona unwittingly co-opted the nineteenth-century stereotypes of orality and literacy, namely the false preconception that verbal recitations pertained to coarse and under-educated individuals, while more cultured people partook of silent reading. D'Ancona portrayed Angiolieri and his readership, therefore, as a specific class of characters amused by lowbrow humor. D'Ancona's study, however, drew the ire of the modernist playwright Luigi Pirandello. Pirandello, as a positivist, objected; judging from Angiolieri's own verse, Cecco's ignorance and vices were the cause of all his ills, Pirandello wrote, and since he never learned from mistakes he could not rightly be called a humorist.⁸ Pirandello too presupposed the level of education and culture of Angiolieri and his admirers from the notion that he composed his verse for oral recitation. But he denied any comicality to Angiolieri's sonnets on the basis that they represented accurately the poet's personality and situations. For decades afterward, numerous scholars chimed in on the question, arguing for either one side or the other, or trying to reconcile the two positions.

As shown by the brief overview of the polemics between D'Ancona and Pirandello, the question of performance, and hence of orality, is central to the question of laughter regarding Cecco Angiolieri and comic literature. Of course, literacy was the domain of a few highly learned individuals during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. But orality could not be restricted to or from any one particular group in the Middle Ages.⁹ Regardless of their level of learning, all people engaged in oral recitations, from the public performances of texts by professionals to the narration of folklore by common individuals.¹⁰ Nor should we assume that oral performances in the Middle Ages carried with them the stigma of ignorance that would mark them in more recent centuries because literacy as such mostly referred to the ability to read Latin. Furthermore, the written word

dugentesco in quattro atti by Nino Berrini (Milan: Casa Editrice Italia, 1920), and the pulp novel by Eugenio Pucci, *Il poeta senza sole Cecco Angiolieri: Romanzo* (Florence: G. Nerbini, 1943).

⁷ Alessandro D'Ancona, "Cecco Angiolieri da Siena, poeta umorista del secolo XIII," in *Studi di critica e storia letteraria*, second edition (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1912), 163–275; here 131–32.

⁸ Luigi Pirandello, "I sonetti di Cecco Angiolieri," *Saggi*, ed. M. Lo Vecchio Musti (Milan: Mondadori, 1952), 289–335; here 293–94.

⁹ Evelyn Birge Vitz, *Orality and Performance in Early French Romance* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1999), ix–x.

¹⁰ John Ahern, "Dioneo's Repertory: Performance and Writing in Boccaccio's *Decameron*," in *Performing Medieval Narrative*, ed. Evelyn Birge Vitz, Nancy Freeman Regalado, and Marilyn Lawrence (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2005), 41–58; here 41–43.

overlapped with oral culture, particularly as regards poetry.¹¹ In his study *The Medieval Lyric*, Peter Dronke affiliates essentially all poetry with musical performances.¹² For instance, in the second canto of *Purgatorio*, Dante describes the soul of Casella singing one of his *canzoni*, “Amor che ne la mente mi ragiona” (v. 112), providing a precious indication of the musical performance of poetry around the turn of the fourteenth century.¹³ There is also ample evidence that Dante’s very literary *Comedy* itself was publicly recited during the second and third decades of the fourteenth century.¹⁴ While most modern-day readers experience medieval poetry through silent reading, it is safe to assume that a large percentage of Angiolieri’s fourteenth-century fans did not. They probably heard it recited in some form or another.

Like other comic poets, Angiolieri inscribes elements of oral performances into his works, frequently exhorting his audience to stop and listen (“udite”) and making other similar interlocations.¹⁵ Such expressions might have simply been a literary trope, or they might be traces of actual recitations. In either event, they establish the ideal communicative stance with the reader/listeners, providing us clues for the appropriate responses to the poem. The poet establishes a dialogue with the audience, asking for their pity, understanding, or support. Still, if Angiolieri recited his verse verbally, we have no evidence to confirm D’Ancona’s claim that pubs were his specific performance locales, since the tavern is such a common topos of medieval literature. The manuscripts with Cecco’s verse are identical to those of other great writers of the time; hence they imply a similar readership.

As Sebastian Coxon reminds us, performance is essential for laughter.¹⁶ But while the authors under examination invite the readers to respond to their verses as if to a recitation, they offer few indications of humorous intent. The references to laughter in their comic poetry are few, and they generally do not indicate the expected response to the verse. In two instances, Angiolieri’s laughter represents the cruel reaction to the news of someone else’s suffering,¹⁷ and in a third case it

¹¹ Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London and New York: Methuen, 1982), 54.

¹² Peter Dronke, *The Medieval Lyric*, second edition (1968; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

¹³ For an analogue in English literature, see also Carl Lindahl’s study on Geoffrey Chaucer’s absorption and representation of the oral traditions in his literature, *Earnest Games: Folkloric Patterns in the Canterbury Tales* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989).

¹⁴ John Ahern, “Singing the Book: Orality in the Reception of Dante’s *Comedy*,” *Annals of Scholarship* 2.3 (1981): 17–40; here 17–21.

¹⁵ Maurizio Vitale, *Rimatori comico-realistici del Due e Trecento* (Turin: UTET, 1965), 29–30.

¹⁶ Sebastian Coxon, *Laughter and Narrative in the Later Middle Ages: German Comic Tales 1350–1525* (Leeds: Legenda. Modern Humanities Research Association and Maney Publishing, 2008), 10.

¹⁷ See “Da po’ t’è’n grado, Becchina, ch’i’ muoia” in which he claims that two other individuals will

connotes his happy state now that he is no longer in love.¹⁸ Only in one poem might he allude to the laughter of his readers / listeners. In that sonnet Cecco describes his poverty as so dire that he pawned his laughter, and he concludes by saying he would kill whoever laughed.¹⁹ The closing line of the poem could be an objection to his listeners' chuckles, although it does not necessarily need to be read in such a manner. Similarly, Rustico Filippi does not generally discuss laughter. In only one poem does he assert that now that his jaws have healed from some unspecified injury he wants to laugh over someone else's bad news.²⁰ Like Angiolieri, he expresses a malicious sense of humor, or *Schadenfreude*, inspired by the misfortune of enemies. Thus, while the comic writers refer to verbal performances in their lyrics, they offer virtually no internal evidence that they hoped their audiences would laugh.

Due to some of the problems with D'Ancona's interpretation, as I have outlined, in the 1950s Mario Marti revolutionized the critical discussion of comic writers, and in the process drew to an end the debates over Angiolieri's humor. Basing his analysis on literary definitions of the time, Marti concluded that in medieval culture the comic was strictly a question of style. For instance, the twelfth-century theorist Geoffrey of Vinsauf asserted the unadorned style of comic literature required only plain language.²¹ It followed stylistic standards as rigorous as any other style with the purpose of imitating popular speech. Different writers during the Middle Ages, many with unique viewpoints, repeated the commonplaces that comedies adhered to certain stylistic traits diametrically opposed to those found in tragedies: comedies were fictive stories dealing with low-born individuals, written in a low or middling style, and with a plot structure that begins in chaos but resolves with the establishment of order. Nothing in the medieval definitions of comedy indicated laughter. The situation became more complicated at the height of the fourteenth century as Dante's *Comedy* became a literary touchstone. Many commentators proffered various explanations for the title of Dante's work,

laugh at the news of Cecco's death: "Mit'e Turella ne farà gran risa" (v. 12). See also "Io vorre' 'nanzi 'n grazia ritornare" in which Cecco laughs at hearing how the woman's new lover mistreats her: "udendol dir . . . rido e gabbo" (v. 14).

¹⁸ See "Io sent'ò sentirò ma' quel d'amore," in which he describes his new, out-of-love state: "or viv'e cant' en allegrezza e riso" (v. 9).

¹⁹ See "Per sì gran summa ho pegnata la risa": "uccidere' chiunca ridesse" (v. 14).

²⁰ See "Poi che guerito son de le mascelle": "io no rido, ancor ch'i smanio e canto" (v. 2).

²¹ Geoffrey of Vinsauf writes: "Res comica namque recusat / arte laboratos sermones: sola requirit / plana" ("For comic material rejects discourse reworked by art, and requires only plain speech," vv. 1890–92). Geoffrey's text and translation are cited from *The Poetria Nova and Its Sources in Early Rhetorical Doctrine*, ed. and trans. Ernest Gallo (The Hague and Paris: Mouton, 1971).

sometimes at odds with one another.²² But none of them implied that Dante's masterpiece had anything funny about it.

Yet Filippi, Angiolieri, and their followers might not have considered themselves to be composing comedies at all. In the history of medieval literary criticism, beginning with the introduction of Averroes to European readership, tragedy and comedy were counterpoised to one another in performing an ethical service; tragedy was the art of praising the virtuous, while comedy was blaming the sinful.²³ The conceptual opposition of tragedy (praise) to comedy (blame) did not remain limited to Averroistic thought but rather became pervasive throughout the centuries that followed.²⁴ In the treatises of some writers, satire was affiliated with the lowest, most humble linguistic register, while comedy had a middling style; other thinkers simply removed satire from consideration, positioning comedy as the poetics of blame, and associating comic writings with both the low and middle styles.²⁵ In the end, the distinction between comedy and satire was minimal, since both occupied similar linguistic registers in service of blaming the blameworthy.

In the early thirteenth century Matthew of Vendôme, for example, stressed that literary descriptions imply the praise or blame of the protagonists. Matthew provides sample portrayal of different individuals, concluding with the reprehensible old hag, Beroë (par. 58).²⁶ Through Beroë Matthew paints the traditional image of woman as physically revolting, loquacious, and lustful.²⁷ His intention is precisely to inspire disgust and condemnation in the reader with the implicit moral purpose of rejecting all that she represents. Angiolieri and Filippi clearly knew of Matthew's treatise because they figure among the earliest writers of the poetic tradition of *vituperatio vetulae*, violent imprecations against, and

²² Henry Ansgar Kelly provides an extensive overview of the fourteenth-century discussion of Dante's title; see his *Tragedy and Comedy from Dante to Pseudo-Dante* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989). A few examples of the medieval conversation of Dante's work follow. Guido da Pisa (ca. 1328) explained that comedies have a harsh style (20), so Dante's title was due to its good-to-bad structure (23). Pietro Alighieri explained that the supposed low style of comedies meant they could use the vernacular (28). Boccaccio rejects the notion that Dante's style is comic because it is polished, graceful and sublime (45–46); he concluded that Dante's use of the term "comedy" was figurative (47). Benvenuto da Imola argued that its style was middling, and hence, comic, while its subject matter was satiric, because it reprehends vice (51).

²³ Judson Boyce Allen, *The Ethical Poetic of the Later Middle Ages: A Decorum of Convenient Distinction* (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1982), 19–20.

²⁴ Zygmunt G. Baranski, "'Tres enim sunt manerie dicendi . . .': Some Observations on Medieval Literature, 'Genre', and Dante," *The Italianist* 15, supp. 2 (1995): 9–60; here 43.

²⁵ Suzanne Reynolds, "Orazio satiro (*Inferno* IV, 89): Dante, the Roman satirists, and the medieval theory of satire," *The Italianist* 15: Supplement 2 (1995): 128–144; here 132.

²⁶ Matthew of Vendôme is cited from *The Art of Versification*, ed. and trans. Aubrey E. Galyon (Ames: Iowa State Press, 1980).

²⁷ Patrizia Bettella, *The Ugly Woman: Transgressive Aesthetic Models in Italian Poetry from the Middle Ages to the Baroque* (Toronto, Buffalo, and London: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 18.

repulsive descriptions of, the “old woman.” In such poetry the old woman symbolizes vice and sexuality, but she also represents a threat to male lovers because she advises young women about how best to exploit their paramours.²⁸ As comical as the portrait of Beroë is, Matthew does not hold her up for laughter but as an example of vituperation (par. 59). Filippi, Angiolieri, and others may have considered their sonnets to be satires following the example of Matthew’s passage on Beroë. If so, however, it changes nothing for the current discussion; medieval theorists defined satires as the reprehension of vice, and not as laughter about human folly. In the end, whether read as comedies or satires, the sonnets by Filippi and Angiolieri should not have been funny, according to the theorists of the time.

By all the evidence explored thus far, we should conclude, like Mario Marti in 1953, that Angiolieri’s comicality was strictly a question of style with no intent to amuse. But one document about the medieval reception of their verse suggests otherwise. Giovanni Boccaccio’s masterpiece *Decameron* (ca. 1351) is a summa of fourteenth-century literature, encompassing within itself numerous genres.²⁹ Boccaccio, as is well known, constructs his work around the frame narrative of ten storytellers fleeing from plague-stricken Florence and recounting their narratives over ten days. At the end of each day, the tellers relax and sing, providing a glimpse of the musical practices at the height of the *Trecento*.³⁰ At the end of each composition, whether a narrated tale or a sung poem, the narrator relates the listeners’ reactions. The listeners’ responses to the works, therefore, constitute a type of reader-response criticism built into the frame story. They indicate how the author intended the texts to be interpreted by an ideal reader. Two portions of the *Decameron*, one tale and one song, may provide clues as to the medieval reception of Cecco Angiolieri and Rustico Filippi. They suggest that an appropriate response to their poetry was, in fact, laughter.

The fourth story of the ninth day consists of a narrative about the poet of Siena himself, Cecco Angiolieri.³¹ Unable to make ends meet on the allowance his father gives him, Angiolieri decides to travel to Ancona for business purposes. Another man also named Cecco, Fortarrigo, who is dissimilar from Angiolieri in almost

²⁸ Gretchen Mieszkowski, “Old Age and Medieval Misogyny: The Old Woman,” in *Old Age in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: Interdisciplinary Approaches to a Neglected Topic*, ed. Albrecht Classen. Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture, 2 (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2007), 299–319; here 302. See also Karen Pratt, “*De vetula*: The Figure of the Old Woman in Medieval French Literature,” *Old Age in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, 321–42.

²⁹ Vittore Branca, *Boccaccio medievale e nuovi studi sul Decameron* (Florence: Sansoni, 1996), 116.

³⁰ Howard Mayer Brown, “Fantasia on a theme by Boccaccio,” *Early Music* 5.3 (July 1977): 324–39; here 325–26.

³¹ For the sake of clarity, the protagonists of tale will be identified with Boccaccio’s spelling, Angiolieri, while the actual poet will be identified with the traditional spelling, Angiolieri

every way, begs to travel with him as his servant. The two individuals are united only in their hatred for their respective fathers, and from this similarity a friendship had developed. Nonetheless, Angiulieri hesitates to bring Fortarrigo along because Fortarrigo was known to frequent the taverns and to get drunk. Angiulieri finally relents and they set off. After a half day of traveling, they stop to rest at an inn. Angiulieri falls asleep in his room, while Fortarrigo goes to gamble in the tavern. He loses all his money, then empties Angiulieri's purse of all its coins and loses them as well. Angiulieri eventually rouses and, finding Fortarrigo in a deep sleep (due to an excess of alcohol), tries to pay the innkeeper, only to discover all his money missing. Believing he was robbed in his sleep, he makes an angry scene. Fortarrigo appears and asks Angiulieri that they delay the departure; he pawned his doublet, he explains, and he may be able to recover it if Angiulieri lends him thirty coins. Angiulieri realizes what has happened and he berates Fortarrigo publicly. As their conversation progresses, Fortarrigo gives the appearance that Angiulieri had been the one to gamble away their funds. Angiulieri, now enraged, mounts his horse and rides off with Fortarrigo following in his underclothes. After several miles, Fortarrigo sees some workmen in the distance. He calls to them claiming that Angiulieri has robbed him; they pull Angiulieri from the horse, undress him and put his clothes on Fortarrigo, and then help Fortarrigo onto his steed. The story ends with the teller noting that Fortarrigo's evil actions would not go unpunished, suggesting another similar narrative which has since been lost.

The tale of Fortarrigo getting the better of Angiulieri appears constructed, to some degree, on the poet's actual literature. In Angiolieri's corpus, one extant sonnet is addressed to Cecco Fortarrigo, in which the poet happily boasts that his own father has died and teases the other man that his father will live for centuries. The sonnet is evidence of a much broader *tenzone* between Angiolieri and Fortarrigo about their fathers. Additionally, the tale includes the medieval comic literary motif of drinking, and gambling in a tavern, which results in the loss of one's clothes.³² Here Boccaccio reworks the topos so that the person that loses his clothes, Angiulieri, is not the one who took to the tavern. The understanding of Angiolieri's poetry revealed in the *Decameron*, it must be stressed, is Boccaccio's and not Angiolieri's; we should not confuse it with Angiolieri's actual intentions.

³² Martha Bayless, *Parody in the Middle Ages: The Latin Tradition*. Recentiores: Later Latin Texts and Contexts (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 94. It should be noted that this was not merely a literary trope, but a commonplace in medieval culture in general. Richard C. Trexler notes that Italian statutes defined "ribalds" as those who undressed down to their underclothes while gambling. See Richard C. Trexler, "Correre la Terra: Collective Insults in the Late Middle Ages," in *Dependence in Context in Renaissance Florence*. Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 111 (Binghamton, NY: Medieval & Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1994), 113–70; here 121.

Nonetheless, since Boccaccio demonstrates a critical understanding of Cecco's poetry in this tale, his implicit criticism of it is valuable.

In the comments that follow the tale, Boccaccio notes that the storytellers followed the tale with some discussion and, notably, laughter:

Finita la non lunga novella di Neifile, senza troppo o *riderne* o parlare passatasene la brigata³³

[Neifile's story was of no great length, and when it drew to a close it was passed off by the company without much [lit., without too much] *laughter* or comment (IX, 5, 1, emphases added).]

Unlike any other medieval text, Boccaccio places the word "laughter" in tantalizing proximity to Cecco Angiolieri the character, and by extension, Cecco Angiolieri the poet. Boccaccio's passage is enigmatic, because it does not clarify the reason for the listeners' laughter. Was laughter intrinsic to Angiolieri's literature, or was it merely a reaction to the humorous tale? Furthermore, Boccaccio does not indicate the nature of their amusement, whether caused by admiration for the sly antics of the character, Cecco Fortarrigo, or inspired by disdain for his personal failings? Or did the listeners chuckle at the expense of the deceived Cecco Angiolieri, who could not successfully extricate himself from the situation? Unfortunately, from the specific context of the tale we cannot know the exact answers to these questions.

The second instance of the *Decameron* may address some of the issues regarding the laughter about the tale of Cecco Angiolieri. It is not a tale, but action which occurs in the frame story. At the end of day five, the new queen, Elissa, is crowned for the following day. She requests a song from the teller Dioneo. He obliges, and the scene unfolds as follows:

Il quale prestamente cominciò *Monna Aldruda, levate la coda, ché buone novelle vi reco*. Di che tutte le donne cominciarono a ridere, e massimamente la reina, la quale gli comandò che quella lasciasse e dicessene un'altra.

Disse Dioneo: — Madonna, se io avessi cembalo io direi *Alzatevi i panni, monna Lapa o Sotto l'ulivello è l'erba*; o voleste che io dicessi *L'onda del mare mi fa sì gran male*? Ma io non ho cembalo, e per ciò vedete voi qual voi volete di queste altre. Piacerebbevi *Esci fuor che sie tagliato, Com' un mio in su la campagna*? —

Disse la reina: — No, dinne un'altra. —

— Dunque, — disse Dioneo — dirò io *Monna Simona imbotta imbotta, E' non è del mese d'ottobre*. —

³³ The *Decameron* is cited from Giovanni Boccaccio, *Decameron*, ed. Vittore Branca (Turin: Einaudi, 1992). Translations of the *Decameron* are from Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Decameron*, trans. G. H. McWilliam (London: Penguin, 1972).

La reina ridendo disse: —Deh in malora! dinne una bella, se tu vuogli, ché noi non voglian cotesta. —

Disse Dioneo: —No, madonna, non ve ne fate male: pur qual vi piace? Io ne so più di mille. O volete *Questo mio nicchio, s'io nol picchio o Deh fa pian, marito mio*, o *Io comperai un gallo delle lire cento*? —

La reina allora un poco turbata, quantunque tutte l'altre ridessero, disse: —Dioneo, lascia stare il motteggiare e dinne una bella; e se no, tu potresti provare come io mi so adirare. — (Day 5 conclusion, ll. 7–14).

[Dioneo was called upon to sing, and he immediately came out with “Monna Aldruda, lift up your tail, for marvelous tidings I bring.” Whereupon all the ladies began to laugh, especially the queen, who ordered him to stop and sing them another.

“My lady,” said Dioneo, “if I had a drum [lit., tambourine] I’d sing you ‘Skirts up, Monna Lapa,’ or ‘The grass beneath the privet grows,’ or if you preferred, ‘The waves of the sea are my torment.’ But I haven’t a drum [lit., tambourine] so take your pick from among these others. Would you like ‘Out you come to wither away, like to the flower that blossoms in May’?”

“No,” said the queen, “sing us something else.”

“In that case,” said Dioneo, “I’ll sing you ‘Monna Simona, put wine in your cask.’”

“Not till October,” she said.

“Oh, confound you,” said the queen, with a laugh, “if you’re going to sing, choose something nice. We don’t want to hear that one.”

“Come, my lady,” said Dioneo, “Don’t take offense. Which do you like best? I know a thousand of them, at least. Would you like ‘I never have enough of my little bit of stuff,’ or ‘Ah! Be gentle, husband dear,’ or ‘I bought myself a cock for a hundred pounds’?”

All the ladies laughed except the queen, who was beginning to grow impatient with him.

“No more of your nonsense, Dioneo,” she said. “Sing us something pleasant, or you’ll learn what it means to provoke my anger.”]

There is much to say about this passage. Through Dioneo’s statements, Boccaccio offers a glimpse into the fourteenth-century performance of humorous songs. Dioneo cannot sing a number of them because, he affirms, he does not possess a tambourine. Thus, the *Decameron* provides information about the musical instrumentation of bawdy material.³⁴ Musicologists note that during the fourteenth century, tambourines and other forms of percussion were associated with urbane musicians.³⁵ The passage discredits the notion put forward by D’Ancona that the

³⁴ Dante’s *Inferno* provides apparent confirmation of the use of percussion in humorous songs. In the thirtieth canto, an argument breaks out between the false witness Sinon and the counterfeiter Master Adam. Their argument, many scholars believe, follows the pattern of a medieval literary exchange, a *tenzone*. But the episode begins when Sinon strikes Adam across his bloated belly which resounds like a drum (v. 103).

³⁵ Howard Mayer Brown, “Fantasia on a Theme by Boccaccio,” 334.

audience of Angiolieri, Filippi, and their compatriots were coarse, uneducated tavern-goers. All the tellers of the *Decameron*, including Dioneo, are educated individuals who find themselves in a refined setting, and are knowledgeable about many different genres. For example, after Dioneo relents, he sings a song of amorous praise reminiscent of the poetry of the *dolce stil nuovo*. Of course, Boccaccio's text constitutes a sample of one, so we must trust that it represents accurately the practices of musical performances in the 1340s and 50s. And, of course, the style of performance might have changed in the half-century since the deaths of Filippi and Angiolieri. Nevertheless, it offers the first evidence as to what their poems, when set to music, may have sounded like.

In the conclusion to day five Boccaccio also recounts the listeners' responses to recitations of comic verse. All the women laugh when Dioneo starts the first song, they laugh when he suggests other titles, and they continue to laugh as Elissa becomes increasingly frustrated. The questions to resolve, then, are the classification of Dioneo's songs themselves. Are they truly representative of the poetry of Filippi and Angiolieri or do they belong to another genre altogether? And then, how shall we try to make sense of the listeners' reactions? Are they laughing at the songs, or at Dioneo's stubbornness? And if the songs are humorous, what can we tell about the nature of such laughter?

Their *incipit* verses of the songs offered by Dioneo consist, undoubtedly, of saucy double-entendres. As a narrator Dioneo tells bawdy tales at the end of each day, and the songs seem consistent with his repertoire.³⁶ Indeed, he stresses in the passage above that he knows by heart more than a thousand such songs, although that number is certainly an exaggeration. It is very likely that they were famous compositions at the time because, happily, one of them has survived. The ballata "Questo mio nicchio, s'io nol picchio" represents the conversation between a pubescent girl and her mother.³⁷ Now that she is sexually maturing, she complains that her "conch" ("nicchio") does not leave her mind in peace unless she strikes it. She characterizes her "conch" as moody and angry thanks to its fasting (vv. 3–10). In the event the listeners missed the metaphor, she then describes it as growing dark and hairy (vv. 11–14). The mother responds assuring her that she will find it a large club ("mazzapicchio") with which to strike it (vv. 15–18). The song concludes with the girl urging her mother not to delay, and cursing the oxen she now must tend (vv. 19–26).

Boccaccio famously has a remarkably flexible view of women, ranging from the misogyny of medieval patristic writings to the courtly exaltation of their beauty,

³⁶ John Ahern, "Dioneo's Repertory: Performance and Writing in Boccaccio's *Decameron*," 48.

³⁷ The ballata "Questo mio nicchio, s'io nol picchio" is cited from *Poeti minori del Trecento*, ed. Natalino Sapegno (Milan and Naples: Ricciardi, 1952).

varying from genre to genre.³⁸ At times he portrays their sexuality in a seemingly positive manner as part of his naturalistic view on human nature. Yet Boccaccio did not compose this song, he merely referred to it. Instead, it seems to present the traditional view of women as sexually voracious.³⁹ During the Middle Ages women were frequently associated strictly with the flesh and therefore were viewed as inferior.⁴⁰ In his writings Boccaccio repeatedly exalts spiritual love for women, but there is nothing spiritual about this plebeian adolescent. Her sexual appetite induces her to request a man—any man—to satisfy her. The song therefore seems to deride women by highlighting their extreme sexuality.

Reference to a second song survives as well, but it is problematic. The sixteenth-century author Anton Francesco Doni relates the origin of a song remarkably similar to Dioneo's "Monna Simona imbotta imbotta" ("Monna Simona, put wine in your cask"). In his compendium of anecdotes, *La zucca*, Doni explains that Zanobi Fabene, formerly a farmer and now a wealthy city-dweller, composed the song:

Aveva poi da cinque o sei figliuoli, tutti disutili per essere piccoli, e una moglie tanto perversa che egli fece quella canzone che comincia;

Mona Lapa imbotta imbotta
se tu vuoi cento mal anni.

La qual finisce, dopo una lunga filastrocca di dispiaceri:
chi non sa quel che son doglie
provi un tratto la mia moglie. (Passerotto IIII)⁴¹

[He had then either five or six children, all useless because too small, and a wife so perverse that he made that song that begins:

Lady Lapa, put it in the cask
if you want one hundred bad years

It ends, after a lengthy recitation of displeasures, like:

Whoever doesn't know what pains are
should try a short time with my wife.]

³⁸ Aldo Scaglione, *Nature and Love in the Late Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963), 54–56.

³⁹ Joan Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science, and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 178.

⁴⁰ Guyda Armstrong, "Boccaccio and the Infernal Body: The Widow as Wilderness," in *Boccaccio and Feminist Criticism*, ed. Thomas C. Stillinger and F. Regina Psaki. Studi e Testi, 8 (Chapel Hill, NC: Annali d'Italianistica, 2006), 83–104; here 85.

⁴¹ Cited from Anton Francesco Doni, *Le novelle*, vol. 2, ed. Elena Pierazzo (Rome: Salerno Editrice, 2003), 325.

Doni's narrative cannot be fully trusted because some two centuries separate it from Boccaccio's *Decameron*. Also, Doni's second line ("if you want one hundred bad years") differs greatly from Dioneo's ("Not till October," she said"). Nonetheless, the two opening lines are nearly identical, suggesting some relationship, however distant, between them. Clearly, Doni's song consists of an anti-uxorious diatribe.

Another tale of Boccaccio's *Decameron* seems to corroborate the interpretation of Dioneo's songs as informed by commonplace misogynistic attitudes. The second story of the eighth day relates how a rural priest tries to bed the young wife of a local farmer. When he discovers that her husband is away, he attempts to convince her to have sex with him, while she agrees but only if he will give her five coins. Since he does not have them with him, he offers to leave an expensive bolt of cloth with her as a guarantee of his future payment. She consents, and they have sex in the silo. After the priest returns to the parish he tries to get the fabric back. He sends another cleric to her house with a mortar, feigning that he had left the fabric with her as bond for borrowing the mortar. At first she refuses, but her simple-minded husband orders her to return the fabric to him. She goes, and after some wrangling, she has sex with him, he gives her the five coins, and both are happy.

Boccaccio laces the second tale of day eight with repeated references to Rustico Filippi's comic lyrics. The narrator describes the woman, named Belcolore, as follows:

una piacevole e fresca foresozza, brunazza e ben tarchiata e atta a meglio saper macinar che alcuna altra (l. 9)

[a vigorous and seductive-looking wench, buxom and brown as a berry, who seemed better versed at the grinder's art than any other girl in the village.]

Throughout the tale the author insists on suffixes, describing the priest's kisses as "basciozzi" (l. 38) and naming another woman who had been sexually deceived by the priest as "Biliuzza" (l. 30). The addition of suffixes, both pejorative (-AZZO) and diminutive (-UZZO), recollects the poetic topos of the reprehension of the old woman, a literary tradition with its roots in Matthew of Vendôme's Beroë.⁴² In the poetry of *vituperatio vetulae*, the use of such suffixes in the prominent rhymed position is a commonplace.⁴³ The location for Belcolore's dalliance with the priest,

⁴² Importantly, Boccaccio reiterates this motif from the *vituperatio vetulae* topos in the fourth story of day eight. In it a man is tricked into having sex not with the beautiful woman he loves, but with an ugly servant named "Ciutazza."

⁴³ Paolo Orvieto and Lucia Brestolini, *La poesia comico-realistica: dalle origini al Cinquecento* (Rome: Carocci, 2000), 16–20.

the silo, similarly recalls Filippi's language, since at several instances the poet publicly denigrates women by exposing his sexual activities with them in barns.⁴⁴

In the culture of the fourteenth-century Italian communes, the notion of having sex with women in stalls seems to imply their public availability to men.⁴⁵ It also, undoubtedly, associates them with low-born peasantry rather than noblewomen, as in the case of the adolescent girl whose "conch" now troubles her. Rustico, then, appears to expose those women as prostitutes. Additionally, when Belcolore's husband urges her to return the priest's fabric, he utters an imprecation, "Fo boto a Cristo" ("I swear to Christ," l. 43) which is itself reminiscent of the *incipit* line of one of Rustico's poems: "Fo ben boto a Dio: se Ghigo fosse." All of this is to say that Boccaccio structures the second story of day eight around Rustico's misogynistic topos of *vituperatio in foeminas*.

Importantly, Boccaccio draws a connection between the tale of Belcolore and Dioneo's songs in the conclusion to day five. The author describes Belcolore as a woman who performs songs similar to those proposed by Dioneo:

era quella che meglio sapeva sonare il cembalo e cantare *L'acqua corre la borrana*⁴⁶ e menar la ridda e il ballonchio, quando bisognava faceva, che vicina che ella avesse, con bel moccicchino e gente in mano" (l. 9).

⁴⁴ In "Da che guerra m'avete incominciata," Rustico asks his female addressee to recall that he knew she was not a virgin when he pounded her bottom against the stall floor ("Ché foste putta il die che voi nasceste:/ ed io ne levai saggio ne la stalla,/ ché 'l culo in terra percosteste," vv. 9–11). Similarly, in "A voi, Chierma, so dire una novella," Rustico says that if she'll open her buttocks in the dovecote he'll insert such a large crank that she'll find it pleasurable: "se voi porrete il culo al colombaio;/ cad io vi porgerò tal manovella,/ se non vi piace, io non ne vo' danaio" (vv. 2–4).

⁴⁵ The study on imprecations by Salvatore Bongi may provide further information about the nature of Rustico's insult. Bongi examines threats and insults found in Lucchese legal documents of the fourteenth century in order to provide an overview of injurious language of the late Middle Ages. Although not perfectly applicable to the discussion at hand, because it deals with Lucca of the *Trecento*, nevertheless Bongi's work highlights the general oral culture in the Tuscany of the age. In several examples, women are accused of engaging in prostitution in stalls. In one instance, someone asserts: "Sossa puttana che tu se', che non à stalla a Luccha che tue non abbi cercata p(er) farti rimona(r)e lo culo, che tu mor(r)ai melio alo spidale come fe' tuo padre (e) fammi lo peggio che tu puoi" ["Dirty whore that you are, for there is no stall in Lucca that you haven't sought out to work your ass, for you will die at the hospital like your father, and do the worst to me that you can!"] (par. 88, p. 36). Similarly, another woman is called a: "Sossa puttana, tingnosa stallaiola" ["Dirty whore, ringworm-ridden stall-vendor!"] (par. 120, p. 42). More generally, women are presented as prostituting themselves in rural contexts. Several are accused of pimping another in ditches and under bushes: "Soççe puctanelle, puctane ch'avete tenuto bordello ad Marllia p(er) le fosse (e) p(er) le sciepi" ["Dirty whores—whores who have made a brothel for Marllia in the ditches and in the bushes"] (par. 51, p. 28). See Salvatore Bongi, *Ingiurie impropri contumelie ecc. Saggio di lingua parlata del Trecento cavato dai libri criminali di Lucca*, ed. Daniela Marcheschi (Lucca: Maria Pacini Fazzi, 1983).

⁴⁶ A portion of this song, an amorous *ballata*, has survived: *Rime giullaresche e popolari d'Italia*, ed. Vincenzo de Bartolomeis (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1926), 29.

[When, moreover, she had occasion to play the tambourine and sing "A little of what you fancy does you good" and dance a reel or a jig, with a dainty little kerchief in her hand, she could knock the spots off every single one of her neighbors.]

Like Dioneo, Belcolore accompanies her songs with a tambourine, and thanks to her performances she attracts the sexual attentions of the priest. By singing them, she makes a public woman of herself, which may explain the fact that she, like a prostitute, consents to having sex for money in a silo. Since Dioneo, in the conclusion to day five, recommends songs with similar *incipits*, which should be accompanied with the tambourine, we can only conclude that they belonged to the same genre. The overall context of the tale connotes that her songs are derisive of women for their sexual behaviors, and her performance of them compromises her. Clearly, then, Boccaccio has inscribed into his *Decameron* a performance of works similar to those by Filippi, Angiolieri, and others.

Throughout the conclusion to day five, Boccaccio points out that the listeners laughed. The scene between Dioneo and Elissa is amusing as he persists in naming other unsuitable compositions. But before the back-and-forth occurs between Dioneo and Elissa, the women of the *Decameron* laugh. All of them laugh, including the queen, after Dioneo began singing the first of the songs. Later in the episode their laughter is more ambivalent; perhaps they find Elissa's frustration funny, or perhaps Dioneo's guilelessness amuses them; perhaps, too, the song titles tickle them. Undoubtedly, however, the very first instance of laughter in the passage can only be in response to the song itself. While the narrative about Cecco Angiolieri left room for doubt about the nature of the tellers' laughter; here little doubt remains.

If Boccaccio's narrative is representative of thirteenth-century cultural norms, people laughed at verse like that composed by Filippi and Angiolieri. It may not have provoked laughter when it was read in silence; but Boccaccio illustrates that, when it was performed, the audience laughed.

As the scene between Dioneo and Elissa ends, Boccaccio then explains that Dioneo leaves aside such frivolity and sings an amorous song ("Dioneo, udendo questo, lasciate star le ciance, prestamente in cotal guisa cominciò a cantare," l. 15). The specific word Boccaccio uses to describe his songs, *ciance*, has important resonances for this discussion. Throughout the *Decameron* Boccaccio employs the term to denote silly, baseless ideas,⁴⁷ capitalizing on its literary history. In *Paradiso*

⁴⁷ Boccaccio uses the words *ciancia* or *ciance* in ten other instances (II, 1, 16; II, 5, 45; II, 5, 50; III, 3, 19; IV, Introduction, 6; IV, 10, 5; VI, Conclusion, 13; IX, 5, 41; Author's Conclusion, 22; Author's Conclusion, 23). Additionally, he uses the verb *cianciare* eight times, and the adjective *ciancianfera* once. In all instances, Boccaccio employs the word in a manner consistent with the conclusion to the fifth day. For further information, see *Concordanze del "Decameron"*, vol. 1, ed. Alfredo Barbina (Florence: Giunti, 1969), 300.

29, Dante inveighs against preachers more concerned with entertaining their audiences than testifying to the Truth:

Non disse Cristo al suo primo convento:
'Andate, e predicate al mondo *ciance*';

.....

Ora si va con motti e con iscede
a predicare, e pur che ben si rida,
gonfia il cappuccio e più non si richiede.

(vv. 109–110, 115–117; emphasis added)⁴⁸

['Christ did not say to His first congregation
"Go preach idle nonsense to the world,"

.....

'Now preachers ply their trade with buffoonery and jokes,
their cowls inflating if they get a laugh,
and the people ask for nothing more.]

In his invective, Dante uses the lexeme in close relationship to the friars' performance; they speak idle nonsense whose only purpose is to make people laugh.⁴⁹ Undoubtedly, Boccaccio knew the passage from *Paradiso* because he alludes to it in his author's conclusion to the *Decameron*. There he defends himself against the preaching of clerics:

... le prediche fatte da' frati ... il più oggi piene di motti e di ciance e di scede ... (23)

[... the sermons preached by friars today. ... are nowadays filled, for the most part, with jests and quips and raillery. ...]

Boccaccio's phrasing is too close to Dante's to be coincidental. In the conclusion to the fifth day, Boccaccio retains part of Dante's meaning: clearly, Dioneo wanted to divert the other listeners with these songs. For Boccaccio, the term *ciance* denotes outrageous statements with the intention to amuse. It may also have a relationship with the genre of satire. The question, however, is if Boccaccio completely concurs with Dante's signification with the word *ciance*. Are Dioneo's songs, like the friars' sermons, vacuous? Are they truly nonsensical?

Perhaps most telling in this regard is Elissa's response. As the conversation continues, Dioneo implores her not to get angry. Eventually, and despite the laughter of the others, she threatens him with her wrath. The combination of ire and amusement is not paradoxical because the satiric reprehension elicits a form

⁴⁸ The citation and translation of Dante's *Paradiso* are both from Dante *Paradiso*, trans. Robert and Jean Hollander (New York and London: Doubleday, 2007), 714–15.

⁴⁹ In the *Comedy*, Dante uses the word *ciancia* one other time, in *Paradiso* 5: 64. There too it denotes silly nonsense.

of anger; the audience learns of a person's faults, and rejects them accordingly. That is the very definition of derision: to hold up a person for public scorn and ridicule. The conversation in the conclusion to day five resolves itself when Dioneo relents and follows Elissa's command to sing a "nice one" ("una bella"). The song he performs, the *ballata* "Amor, la vaga luce," presumably constitutes the opposite of scabrous poetry. The *ballata* communicates numerous stilnovistic motifs, and the poetry of the *dolce stil nuovo* centered on lauding the woman. Dioneo's poem is no exception. In other words, at the end of the episode Dioneo abandons the poetics of blame in favor of its conceptual opposite, the poetics of praise. Given the context of the storytellers, however, the stilnovistic song may be more appropriate because throughout the *Decameron* Boccaccio insists on their virtuousness. Perhaps for that reason Boccaccio calls the misogynistic songs *ciance*; not because such songs are inherently wrong, but they simply have no place among the honorable narrators.

Throughout the *Decameron*, the tellers laugh at a number of stories. In Boccaccio's work laughter is polyvalent, and a much longer analysis than the present one would be needed to characterize the different types of laughter therein. Derision, however, constitutes one type of it. The last story of the fifth day—the tale immediately preceding the exchange between Dioneo and Elissa—begins with the teller Dioneo making a generalization:

Io non so se io mi dica che sia accidental vizio e per malvagità di costume ne' mortali sopravvenuto, o se pure è nella natura peccato, il rider più tosto delle cattive cose che delle buone opere, e specialmente quando quelle cotali a noi non pertengono. (l. 3)

[Whether it is an accidental failing, stemming from our debased morals, or simply an innate attribute of men and women, I am unable to say; but the fact remains that we are more inclined to laugh at scandalous behavior than virtuous deeds, especially when we ourselves are not directly involved.]

Dioneo all but defines derision when he asserts that people laugh more readily at evil things than at good works, particularly when those sins are alien to the people laughing. Dioneo then reiterates the concept of derision within the tale itself. In the narrative he speaks of a woman unhappily married to a homosexual and who, therefore must take a lover. She seeks advice from an elderly woman, who urges her to take a lover before she is too old:

ché noi [vecchie] siamo messe in canzone e dicono: 'Alle giovani i buon bocconi e alle vecchie gli stranguglioni', e altre lor cose assai ancora dicono." (l. 21)

[And what's worse, they make up rhymes about us [old women], such as "When she's twenty give her plenty. When she's a gammer, give her the hammer," and a lot of other sayings in the same strain.]

By citing the songs about old women, the elderly go-between unmistakably refers to the topos of *vituperatio vetulae* in this passage, with all that it implies.⁵⁰ In the tale she acts as the advisor of young female lovers so frequently derided by such poems, thereby indicating their fundamental veracity. Her allusion to those poems in this tale subtly underscores the social function of reprehension. It speaks the truth about immoral actions, and, exposing them to public ridicule, dissuades people from them.

In conclusion, Boccaccio's *Decameron* helps correct the twentieth-century assumptions about Cecco Angiolieri's performances in the taverns. Boccaccio documents the fourteenth-century recitations of the poetics of *vituperatio in foeminas*. He provides insights as to its performers and listeners, and information about its instrumentation. For the purposes of this discussion, he also notes the reaction of its audience: laughter. In the medieval treatises, derision was not simply a fortuitously selected lexeme from a series of synonyms. Rather, it appears that theorists employed it because of its etymological transparency. Derision literally means "to laugh at" (Latin: *de* + *ridere*). Humor and aggression are not mutually exclusive in this context. On the contrary, aggressive laughter appears to be the mechanism by which satire fulfills its ethical function. It inspires public laughter at the expense of the other person and his or her failings, and in the process reinforces traditional morality. In the case of Rustico Filippi, the social aspect to derisive laughter is readily apparent: he mocks individuals of the Florentine commune in the attempt to shame them into proper behavior. For Angiolieri, the situation may be more complicated. It could be that some of his derision has a social aspect similar to that of Filippi's; his father, for instance, was certainly well-known in Siena, and Dante enjoyed renown as a literary figure. But in most of Angiolieri's works, he mocks himself. In those instances, he may employ laughter to denigrate cultural movements embodied by his poetic persona, such as courtly lovers and dissolute youth. For Angiolieri, the ethical purposes are the same as those for Rustico, but the means to achieve them markedly different. Boccaccio provides evidence that the poets expected their listeners to laugh.

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For an overview of the figure of the go-between in medieval literature, see Gretchen Mieszkowski, *Medieval Go-Betweens and Chaucer's Pandarus*. The New Middle Ages (New York and Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

Chapter 11

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Curses and Laughter in Medieval Italian Comic Poetry: The Ethics of Humor in Rustico Filippi's Invectives¹

Invective—defined generally as the practice of verbally insulting, attacking and ridiculing an individual, group, city or institution—seems to be no laughing matter, especially during the tumultuous thirteenth century.² The frequent eruption of armed conflict and violence gave rise to many acerbic verbal debates, originating from various sources and directed against various targets. From a modern perspective, this association between laughter and aggression seems problematic, since for us laughter is often linked to verbal or practical jokes that have no intention to harm. However, if we consider the etymology of the Italian term “battuta” [joke, literally “hit”]—or even its English equivalent “punch line”—we can see the interplay between verbal attack and ridicule. This association is also visible in the term “invectiva” which originated in classical

¹ I would like to thank professors F. Regina Psaki, Albrecht Classen, and Fabian Alfie for their review of this article and valuable suggestions. I am particularly grateful to my dear wife Jeannette for her support and collaboration.

² Étienne Dussol, in “Petite introduction à l’invective médiévale,” *Invectives: Quand le corps reprend la parole*, ed. Didier Girard and Jonathan Pollock (Perpignan: Presses Universitaires de Perpignan, 2006), 160–73; defines invective as a form of verbal violence projected to demolish the image of an individual opponent, institution, or social group (164). This definition coincides with that provided by Terry V.F. Brogan, in “Invective,” *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (1993), 627–28. Other definitions restrict invective to personal attacks *ad hominem* and emphasize the link between amusement and invective from antiquity to the Renaissance. See for example Severin Koster, *Die Invektive in der griechischen und römischen Literatur*. Beiträge zur klassischen Philologie, 99 (Meisenheim am Glan: Hain, 1980), 148–56; Philip Harding, “Comedy and Rhetoric,” *Persuasion: Greek Rhetoric in Action*, ed. Ian Worthington (New York and London: Routledge, 1994), 201; Lindsay Watson, “Invective,” *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* (2003), 762; and David Rutherford *Early Renaissance Invective and the Controversies of Antonio da Rho* (Tempe, AZ: Renaissance Society of America, 2005), 6.

antiquity (ca. fourth century) from the verb “invehi” [to inveigh or attack], and was linked to any kind of speech which ridiculed an opponent using mordant wit.³

The high and late Middle Ages in Italy offer a wealth of vernacular poetic invectives that show the interaction between what I call “curses and laughter.” Unfortunately, these rich medieval texts are both understudied and rarely juxtaposed. Modern critics generally prefer to examine the rhymes of spiritual and erotic love, and with only few exceptions, they usually employ the comic tradition of invective—often defined as *vituperium*—in order merely to juxtapose it with the more dignified tradition of the *Stilnovo*.⁴ This has led critics to view invective poetry as *a priori* subversive or a marginalized form of recreation with minimal ethical weight.⁵

Yet invective offers a wide range of poetic expressions that often contain both biographical and historical references to such dimensions such as interpersonal social relations, civic chaos, violence, wars, and current political and religious

³ The tradition of invective dates back to both Cicero and Quintilian when invective speech was highly valued in Roman courts; see Donald A. Russell’s Introduction to *Quintilian: The Orator’s Education, Books 6–8*. Loeb Classical Library 124 (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2001), 5. As Pier Giorgio Ricci notes, in “La tradizione dell’invettiva tra il Medioevo e l’Umanesimo,” *Lettere Italiane* 26.4 (1974): 405–14; the term *invectiva* is first documented in the fourth century (406). Subsequently, the term is used throughout the Middle Ages for any kind of speech that blames, and is etymologically linked to Latin expressions such as *invektivus* (abusive), *vituperatio* (blame), or *exclamatio* (apostrophe) in situations of *controversia* (controversy) and *disputatio* (dispute), as evident from the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, 1.2; 2.7. See Harry Caplan, trans. [Cicero] *Ad C. Herennium de ratione dicendi (Rhetorica ad Herennium)*, The Loeb Classical Library, 403 (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 1954.), 4, 76.

⁴ See for example Paolo Orvieto, “La poesia d’amore e il suo rovescio. I *vituperia* e le tenzoni poetiche,” *La poesia comico-realistica dalle origini al Cinquecento* (Rome: Carocci, 2000), 13–44. Also Steven Botterill, “Minor Writers,” *The Cambridge History of Italian Literature*, ed. Peter Brand and Lino Pertile (Cambridge, MA, and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 108–27; here 115–17. These and many other studies present comic medieval texts either as stylistic exercises of subversion and reversal, or as literary expressions of mere reactions against the ‘higher’ poetic form of the *Stilnovo* and courtly poetry. This predominant critical approach has been recently questioned by Claudio Giunta in *Versi a un destinatario, saggio sulla poesia italiana del Medioevo* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2002), 268–73. In line with Giunta’s study, see also the collection of essays edited by Stefano Carrai and Giuseppe Marrani, *Cecco Angiolieri e la poesia satirica medievale* (Firenze: Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2005).

⁵ This current critical assessment, based on a formalist reading, is a reaction against the excessively biographical interpretation of Post-Romantic critics who treated poets’ works as a nearly-transparent reflection of their lives. For an overview of these two critical approaches and of recent studies, see Fabian Alfie, *Comedy and Culture* (Leeds: Northern Universities Press, 2001), 115–22; also Joan Levin, *Rustico di Filippo and the Florentine Lyric Tradition* (New York: Peter Lang, 1986), 15–21. One of the main advocates of the formalist approach is Mario Marti who has established this interpretation with his influential *Cultura e stile nei poeti giocosi* (Pisa: Nistri-Lischi, 1953). Marti, in “Variazioni sul tema dei giocosi: per un libro di F. Suitner,” *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana* 161 (1984): 580–86, eloquently describes the Post-Romantic interpretation disapprovingly as “romanticume” [Romantic garbage] (586).

tensions. Political invectives also expose a double-edged ethics suggested in the coexistence of both the critical side (in the practice of blaming specific human faults of individuals and collective groups) and the playful side (in the practice of using ridicule and humor to cast such blame). This duality thus challenges an excessively generalized and simplistic approach to the poems encouraging a more in-depth interpretation of the practical function of invective forms articulated through the ridicule and blame of explicit faults.

The Florentine poet Rustico Filippi, among many, is a distinguished author of political invective poetry, even if he is regarded principally as an important reference within the tradition of the so-called *comico-realistici*.⁶ At first glance it might seem that comic poetry, often associated in our minds with recreational humor and laughter, has little to do with politics, hostility, vituperation, and battle. However, as I will show, Rustico's humor was closely bound to the practice of verbal aggression and criticism in thirteenth-century Italy, suggesting that laughter played an important role in medieval poetry serving an ethical function. This essay will explore the ethical weight of two political invectives that the Florentine poet Rustico Filippi wrote in thirteenth-century Tuscany: "A voi, che ve ne andaste per paura" and "A voi, messer Iacopo comare." I will bring to light the historical background of the two invectives and emphasize the coexistence of blame and humor that emerges from them. Once the historical frame of reference becomes more visible, we can better understand and assess the role that laughter plays in Rustico's corpus.

The two invectives are set in wartime and stage political tensions among various political and social groups, such as the Guelphs and Ghibellines, noblemen and working men or *popolani*, in the context of the battles of Montaperti (1260) and Benevento (1266). Furthermore, through verbal aggression and humor, they denounce individual opportunism, cowardice, and the lack of political activism.

⁶ Most critics, such as Mengaldo and Levin, propagate the idea that Rustico was a maverick because his comic corpus was unique in respect to the corpora of other contemporary poets. See Silvia B. Gallarati, *Rustico Filippi: sonetti satirici e giocosi* (Rome: Carrocci, 2005), 119; Pier Vincenzo Mengaldo, *Rustico Filippi: Sonetti* (Torino: Einaudi, 1971), 5; Marti, *Poeti giocosi del tempo di Dante* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1956), 30. Levin eloquently presents Rustico as a pioneer responsible for the birth of comic or jocular Italian poetry: "Rustico di Filippo enjoys a certain renown in the history of medieval Italian lyric for having introduced a new genre, the jocular lyric, to those experimenting with the vernacular" (xiii). See also Mengaldo who labels him as a "caposcuola" (5). However, such a claim is quite dubious if we consider the manuscript tradition of Rustico's sonnets and his more politically oriented comic poems. The fact that the MS Vat. 3793 records Rustico alongside other contemporary Tuscan poets, such as Monte Andrea or Palamidese Bellindotte—who also ventured into the comic style through political *tenzoni*—should encourage a more comprehensive approach toward the tradition of comic poetry in thirteenth-century Italy. See Aldo Francesco Massera's "Tenzoni politiche fiorentine," *Sonetti burleschi e realistici dei primi due secoli*, ed. Luigi Russo (Bari: Laterza, 1940), 39–56.

Each sonnet, by depicting an array of hostile accusations and faults, contains a strong ethical orientation articulated through humor. The disarming presence of humor in these political invectives serves to defuse excessive hostility against the individual targets, providing an opening for dialogue. By combining hostility with ridicule, Rustico crafts a complex model of invective that exposes a dialogic and dynamic poetic practice between author and readers; as readers we are called to carefully examine the complexity and richness of Rustico's sonnets and the practical application of laughter and aggression within the poetic practice of invective.

Rustico Filippi: Life, Invectives, Political Affiliation, and Humor

The Florentine poet Rustico Filippi, known as *il barbuto*, lived in the second half of the thirteenth century (ca.1230–ca.1299).⁷ He was not of aristocratic lineage, since his father Filippo di Rustico worked in the textile business producing silk in the neighborhood of Santa Maria Novella and was probably an artisan or merchant.⁸ It is popular belief that Rustico sided with the Ghibelline party, and to my knowledge Vittorio Cian is the only critic who assumes that Rustico was a Guelph: “Rustico, pur essendo a quanto pare, guelfo, ma temperato, non nascondeva certe sue simpatie per la causa ghibellina” [Rustico, though he was seemingly a Guelph, but a mild one, he did not conceal fondness for the Ghibelline cause].⁹ Mario Marti, along with the majority of critics, claims that Rustico “era fieramente ghibellino” [was proudly a Ghibelline].¹⁰ However, critics have not provided concrete evidence

⁷ His birth has been dated in the first half of the thirteenth century, based on the fact that Brunetto Latini dedicated and sent his *Favolello* to Rustico. Since the *Favolello* dates to the years of Latini's exile from Florence, and since in it Latini requests that Rustico send him some of his poetry, it seems clear that by 1260 Rustico must have been an established poet, at least twenty years old, though very likely older. Latini further confirms this possibility by stating that Rustico has “n cima saluto” [climbed to the top] (v.156). See Levin, *Rustico di Filippo*, 4–5.

⁸ Tommaso Casini, the first scholar to research the poet, has documented that Rustico was not of aristocratic lineage; his father, Filippo di Rustico, had worked in the textile business producing silk in the neighborhood of Santa Maria Novella from 1226; See Casini, “Un poeta umorista del secolo decimoterzo,” *Scritti danteschi* 1890 (Citta di Castello: Lapi, 1913), 225–55. Vincenzo Federici, *Le rime di Rustico di Filippo, rimatore fiorentino del secolo XIII*, (Bergamo: Istituto Italiano d'Arti Grafiche, 1899), has added evidence that in 1286 Rustico's son, Lapo, joined the guild of the silk (xv). The information provided by both critics strongly suggests that Rustico was an artisan or merchant as well since he almost certainly inherited the silk trade from his father and passed it on to his son.

⁹ Vittorio Cian, *La satira* (Milan: Vallardi, 1939), 137. All subsequent English translations are mine unless otherwise noted. To my knowledge, all other critics disagree with Cian and think that Rustico was a Ghibelline. See, for example, Gallarati, *Rustico Filippi*, 18–19.

¹⁰ Marti, *Poeti giocosi*, 29.

to support this claim.¹¹ Marti declares that Rustico expresses his political affiliation obviously and openly through his sonnets.¹² This confident assertion is nonetheless unsatisfactory because it relies on literary evidence rather than historical and factual documents.

Most recent critics, such as Silvia Gallarati, have relied on the poems "A voi, che ve ne andaste per paura" and "Fastel, messer fastidio de la cazza" to establish Rustico's political affiliation, as they seem to favor the Ghibelline party.¹³ Even though it is true that these sonnets strike a pro-Ghibelline pose, a careful examination of his entire poetic corpus shows that possibly Rustico deliberately addresses both Guelphs and Ghibellines, attacking and ridiculing both.¹⁴ This is evident from "A voi, messer Iacopo comare," in which Rustico ridicules a pro-Ghibelline and fellow poet because the latter is associated with the pro-Guelph Fastello. Even though Rustico's political affiliation is not currently the object of debate among scholars, during the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of twentieth century, early scholars have posited Rustico as a political and moral activist in the numerous struggles and tensions of mid-thirteenth-century Florence.¹⁵

I believe that we should restore into the modern debate the arguments proposed by these early scholars and reevaluate the conclusion about Rustico being a hardcore Ghibelline (perhaps we should question even his alleged political affiliation with the Ghibelline party). In my opinion, Rustico could be perceived as a flexible Ghibelline, perhaps even a nonpartisan, and a militant poet.

Unlike other medieval poets, for whom we have evidence of their direct involvement in battle, no archival documents mention that Rustico undertook military or political action in Florence. Indeed, all the evidence bearing on his life is scarce and indirect, mentioning mainly his sons. From these few and indirect

¹¹ Ireneo Sanesi's review of Federici, *Le rime di Rustico di Filippo*, in *Rassegna bibliografica della letteratura italiana* 7.8 (1899):193–99, is accurate when he writes that "non è neppure sicuro se e quale parte prendesse alle vicende politiche di Firenze" (194) [it is not even certain if or from which side he took part in the political events in Florence].

¹² Marti, *Poeti giocosi*, 29.

¹³ Gallarati, *Rustico Filippi*, 19.

¹⁴ See Casini, "Un poeta umorista," 248.

¹⁵ As Isidoro Del Lungo notes, Rustico "rinfaccia ai Guelfi la viltà ingenerosa di dare addosso ai caduti" (195) [denounces the Guelphs as unkind because they raged against the dead] See Isidoro del Lungo, "Un realista fiorentino de' tempi di Dante: diporto per Firenze antica," *Rivista d'Italia* 2.3 (1899): 193–212, 425–440. Casini also believes that "il rimatore fiorentino . . . ha un intendimento molto serio e del riso si vale come di uno strumento alla correzione del costume corrotto e del sentimento traviato" [the Florentine poet . . . has very serious intentions and employs laughter as an instrument to correct moral corruption and mislead emotions]; See Casini, "Un poeta umorista," 244. For a concise summary of both critics' views see Gallarati, *Rustico Filippi*, 15 n. 10.

references, scholars have reconstructed Rustico's life and political affiliation. However, any conclusion drawn therefrom must be handled with extreme caution until we find further evidence that mentions his direct involvement in the *comune*. This caveat should also be applied to any speculation about his political orientation.¹⁶

Based on the documentation provided by Vincenzo Federici, modern scholars conclude that Rustico's two sons, Guccio and Lippo, were Ghibellines. Federici has noted that the *Libro dei Guelfi e dei Ghibellini* registers in 1313 that Lippo and Guccio were Ghibellines who were "eccettuati e non riammessi cogli altri banditi e ribelli l'anno 1311 a tempo di Arrigo VII, imperatore" (58) [excluded and not readmitted alongside the other bandits and rebels in the year 1311 at the time of the Emperor Henry VII].¹⁷ However, Federici's conclusion that Rustico's sons were Ghibelline is questionable if compared with additional evidence that has not yet been employed, to my knowledge, by any previous scholars. The *Libro del Chiodo*, compiled by prominent Guelph leaders of the government of Florence, provides a more comprehensive dating pertaining to Rustico's sons than Federici's evidence.¹⁸ A provision confirms the banishment from Florence in 1311 of Rustico's sons and Dante: "Lippus et Ghuccius R(ust)icchi Barbuti Populi Sancte Marie Novelle . . . Dante Allegherii."¹⁹

Though this 1311 stipulation absolves a number of pro-Ghibellines previously exiled, it confirms the banishment of Rustico's sons whose exile from Florence most likely dated back to 1308.²⁰ Based on this evidence, Lippo and Guccio were both exiled from Florence in 1308 alongside with Dante, due to their support of King Henry VII, and because they were accused of taking a pro-Ghibelline stance against Florence.²¹ Federici's conclusion about Rustico's sons being Ghibelline is

¹⁶ Unfortunately, modern critics do not often display such prudence, especially when providing entries for encyclopedias. See for example Levin, "Rustico Filippi," *Medieval Italy: An Encyclopedia* 2: L-Z, ed. Christopher Kleinhenz (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), who takes for granted that "Rustico was an ardent Ghibelline" (993).

¹⁷ See Federici, *Le rime di Rustico*, 58.

¹⁸ See Fabrizio Ricciardelli, *Il Libro del Chiodo* (Rome: Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medio Evo, 1998).

¹⁹ See Ricciardelli, *Il Libro del Chiodo*, 300, 305. I extended the abbreviation in parenthesis since Fabrizio Ricciardelli transcribed it diplomatically as "Ricchi Barbuti" (300). It is evident that it refers to Rustico Filippi's sons as the terms "barbuti" and "Sancte Marie Novelle" match Rustico's nickname and district respectively.

²⁰ They were likely banished in 1308 because the document states that all the individuals mentioned were expelled from Florence "pro aliquo mallefitio reali vel personali commisso de mense octubris millesimo trecentesimo octavo;" [for any criminal activity either public or private committed during the month of October 1308] (translation mine); see Ricciardelli, *Il Libro del Chiodo*, 294.

²¹ See Ricciardelli, *Il Libro del Chiodo*, xiv. Many Ghibelline and White Guelph refugees were in Verona during 1308–1313, among them Dante from 1312 to 1319. See Giuseppe Mazzotta "Life of Dante," *The Cambridge Companion to Dante*, ed. Rachel Jacoff, 2nd ed. (1993; Cambridge:

not entirely true because the list of exiles provided by the *Libro del Chiodo* includes not only Ghibellines but also rebels, bandits, and even White Guelphs who were all opposed to the Black Guelph government of Florence.²² The fact that Dante's name appears in the list alongside Lippo's and Guccio's name should be evidence that we must be cautious when reaching conclusions about the political affiliation of the individuals banished from the list. If we conclude, like Federici, that Rustico's sons were Ghibellines, we must also reach the same conclusion about Dante. However, as John Najemy has recently shown, this is not an accurate assessment of Dante's political affiliation and likewise is not an accurate assessment of Rustico's sons.²³ Thus, I believe that we can safely conclude that Rustico's sons could both have been either Ghibellines, White Guelphs, or even insurgents against the Florentine Black Guelph government.

Lippo and Guccio's political activism, considered like Dante's a very real threat to the stability of the Florentine government, provides further evidence that their father Rustico was almost certainly politically active as well. As we shall see, the possibility that Rustico was politically active does not necessarily mean that he was a devoted Ghibelline, a White Guelph, or an insurgent like his two sons. His invectives express only sympathy for the Ghibellines, not ardent loyalty, and often adopt a position of political moderation in questioning and ridiculing individual Ghibellines. In addition, the fact that no evidence exists to document that Rustico was ever exiled from Florence in 1260 or 1267 (when Florence was first ruled by

Cambridge University Press, 2007), 1–13; here 8. It is possible that Rustico's sons were residing in Verona as well, and thus could have met Dante who shared their political views and was his compatriot and peer.

²² Federici's findings published in 1899 should be approached with caution. One example in particular exhibits this point: Federici dubiously states that Lippo and Guccio were "condannati da Arrigo VII, nel 1313" (x–xi) [condemned by Henry VII in 1313]. The *Libro del Chiodo* clearly states that the Guelph government of Florence condemned them not Henry VII. After he was crowned in Rome, the Emperor Henry VII marched against Florence and the Guelphs of Tuscany with all the Ghibellines; see William Bowsky, *Henry VII in Italy: The Conflict of Empire and City-State 1310–1313*. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1960), 164–65. It is possible that Federici mistakenly reported the data from the *Libro dei Guelfi e dei Ghibellini*, which does not seem surprising after reading Vittorio Cian's review of Federici's study. In his review, Cian highlights Federici's many errors of transcription; see his review in *Bullettino della Società Dantesca Italiana* 7 (1899–1900): 152–57; here, 154.

²³ As John Najemy has recently noted, Dante likely sympathized with the *popolani* before his exile; see John Najemy, "Dante and Florence," *The Cambridge Companion to Dante*, ed. Rachel Jacoff, 2nd ed. (1993; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007): 236–56; here 243. Both Rustico and his sons could be perhaps associated with the *popolani*.

the Ghibellines and then by the Guelphs respectively) suggests that he was never considered a serious threat to either party.²⁴

Finally, the fact that Rustico through humor addresses his invectives to both Guelphs and Ghibellines puts into question a simplistic approach to his corpus. He thus could be perceived as a political moderate who was not excessively loyal to either the Guelphs or the Ghibellines. If viewed as a bipartisan author, Rustico might have been a militant poet who wanted to foster a dialogue with his Florentine compatriots beyond party lines. As we shall see, his verse indeed adopts a much broader political perspective, and is not restricted to a single party but rather serves the common civic interest of his native *comune*.²⁵

By scrutinizing the rhetorical structure of Rustico's vituperative poetry, we can find further evidence that it contains a dialogic charge. The apostrophes that open the invectives could be interpreted as opening vocative greetings of the *Exordium* (used in judicial speech) or *Salutatio* (used in letters).²⁶ According to thirteenth-

²⁴ The absence of evidence regarding Rustico's exile does not necessarily mean that he could not have been exiled from Florence. My speculation is thus debatable until we find more conclusive documentation about Rustico. Casini speculates that the reason why we possess so little evidence on Rustico's life is probably that Rustico belonged to a low social class, so no notaries or chroniclers recorded his deeds because he was considered socially inferior; see Casini, "Un poeta umorista," 230. Casini's conclusion is however very debatable because in fact we possess documentation about Rustico's sons. In addition, as Fabian Affie shows in this volume, other sources such as Francesco da Barberino's *I documenti d'amore*, mention Rustico; see Alfie's article "Yes...but was it funny? Cecco Angiolieri, Rustico Filippi, and Giovanni Boccaccio."

²⁵ Rustico's political ideology should not be merely framed within the simplistic dichotomy of the Guelphs and Ghibellines but instead within a larger socio-political context. Erasmo Percopo, *La poesia giocosa* (Milan: Vallardi, 1906), notes the complex political situation that existed in Florence during Rustico's time (70). Alongside the Guelph and Ghibelline parties, he mentions the third group of the *popolani* or common citizens consisting of rich merchants and bankers who, though of non-noble origin, yet gained wealth and political influence in Florence and were thus initially affiliated neither with the Guelph nor with the Ghibelline parties. Furthermore, each distinct political party was not a monolithic unit but was also divided within itself by neighborhood and family disputes. See, for example, the formation and clash between the groups of White and Black Guelphs during the last years of the thirteenth century. Rustico's political activism and non-partisan ideology should be placed in relation to these various social and political groups that coexisted in Florence since 1260. For a general socio-political overview of thirteenth-century Florence, see ed. Sergio Raveggi, Massimo Tarassi, Daniela Medici, and Patrizia Parenti, *Ghibellini, guelfi e popolo grasso: I detentori del potere politico a Firenze nella seconda metà del Duecento*. La Società Fiorentina nel Duecento, 2; Biblioteca di storia, 23 (Rome: La Nuova Italia, 1978).

²⁶ From a rhetorical perspective, each invective could be divided into specific parts, following the system derived from the Ciceronian six-part *oratio* that later became the standard format for a five-part letter as established through the dictatorial art in the thirteenth century at the University of Bologna. See James J. Murphy, *Latin Rhetoric and Education in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*. Variorum Collected Studies Series, 827 (Aldershot, Hampshire, and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), 14–15. Boncompagno da Signa in his *Retorica novissima* (ca.1215–1235), chapter 2.5, "De instrumento rhetorice," stresses that three parts only should be included in the deliberative discourse: the *Exordium* or *Salutatio* (the formal vocative greeting to the addressee), the *Narratio*

century rhetorical manuals, the *Salutatio* was placed at the beginning of letters or judicial speeches as a strategy for *captatio benevolentiae*.²⁷ However, apostrophe has another rhetorical function: it can communicate *indignatio* [indignation], and is thus a means by which an author can address and persuade an intended audience in a well-defined historical and political frame. Brunetto Latini's influential *Li Livres dou Tresor* devotes an entire section to disdain:

Ce que li parleor dit par desdeing, il le doit dire au plus grie que il puet, si que il mueve [les corages] de l'oïans contre son avversaire; car ce est une chose qui mult profite a sa chausa, quant les oïans, sont commou par corrous contre son avversaire. (III. 68)

[What the speaker says through disdain, he must say with as much gravity as possible, in order to move the hearts of the listeners against his adversary; for this is a matter which is very advantageous to his cause, when the listeners are moved to anger against his adversary.]²⁸

Latini implies that the poet who employs *indignatio* in invective seeks to provoke specific reactions in his addressees. This prominent rhetorical structure documents an established practice in use during the Middle Ages, as well as the existence of a target audience. Rustico almost certainly uses apostrophe to reach multiple targets across party lines, as in the sonnets examined below. One of these invectives addresses either a well-defined political group such as the Guelphs or perhaps even a single unspecified Guelph: "A voi, che ve ne andaste per paura/ Sicuramente potete tornare," [O you who fled for fear / you can safely return, 1-2]. Rustico also launches invectives against his fellow Ghibellines. One of these is

(narration of circumstances leading to a petition), and the *Conclusio* (a final part that substantiates and concludes the speech). See Boncompagno da Signa, "Rhetorica novissima" ed. Augusto Gaudenzi, in *Bibliotheca iuridica medii aevii: Scripta anectoda antiquissimorum* II (Bologna: Pietro Virano, 1892), 249–97. Boncompagno's text has been recently reprinted in *Testi*, ed. Daniela Goldin (Padua: Centro Stampa, 1983), 85–146. As Murphy notes in *Latin Rhetoric*, in the very first treatise of the *ars dictaminis*—the *Breviarium de dictamine* (ca. 1087)—Alberico of Monte Cassino "stresses the importance of the greeting (*Salutatio*) based on the person to whom and the person from whom a letter is sent" (14). The *Rhetorica ad Herennium* confirms the theoretical significance of addressing the audience through the figure of apostrophe (referred to as *exclamatio*) because it enhances the importance of the subject matter of the speech. However, on a practical level, its use is essential for expressing "grief or indignation by means of an address to some man or city or place or object" in order to "instill in the hearer as much indignation as we desire" (*Ad Herennium* IV, xv 22).

²⁷ See for example Brunetto Latini, "La Rettorica," *La prosa del Duecento 1: Arti del dittare, epistole e prosa d'arte*, ed. Cesare Segre and Mario Marti, (Milan: Ricciardi, 1959), 131–70; here 164–65;

²⁸ Latini's citation is from Brunetto Latini, *Li Livres dou Tresor* ed. Spurgeon Baldwin and Paul Barrette (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2003). The English translation is from Brunetto Latini, *The Book of Treasure (Li Livres dou Tresor)*, trans. Paul Barrette and Spurgeon Baldwin (New York and London: Garland, 1993), 346.

Iacopo, addressed by his proper name and, as in the previous example, with the pronoun *voi*: “A voi, messere Iacopo comare, / Rustico s’acomanda fedelmente” (1–2) [To you, Mr. Iacopo godmother, / Rustico commends himself faithfully].²⁹

In addition to the association between *indignatio*, blame, and an implied audience, Rustico’s invectives are suffused with a solid dose of humor. The connection between humor, ridicule, laughter, and blame is well documented in poetic manuals written during Rustico’s time. The master rhetorician Geoffrey of Vinsauf, who taught in Rome and composed the influential *Poetria nova* (ca.1208–1214), discusses the use and role of humor in poetry. His explicit reference to the association of blame and humor documents the important role played by laughter (expressed by the term “ridiculos”) in invective poetry:

Contra ridiculos si vis insurgere plene,
Surge sub hac specie: lauda, sed ridiculose;
Argue, sed lepide gere te, sed in omnibus apte;
Sermo tuus dentes habeat, mordaciter illos
Tange, sed irrisor gestus plus mordeat ore. (431–35)

[If you wish to bestir yourself against ridiculous men, begin in this manner: praise, but with ridicule; discourse, but bear yourself facetiously — although always appropriately. Let your discourse have teeth; speak of the ridiculous bitingly, but let your mocking attitude bite more than your words.]³⁰

Here Geoffrey encourages his readers to balance ridicule with blame in a carefully constructed humorous discourse. More specifically, he values the use of irony in association with proper gestures, providing instructions for achieving a successful confrontation against ridiculous men; as Gallo notes “irony, combined with appropriate gestures, can be of help in effecting ridicule.”³¹ Such evidence confirms the strict connection that existed between poetry, orality, and performance. As Fabian Alfie illustrates, poetry was likely recited with musical instruments and listeners were actively involved in the performance with

²⁹ The term “comare” has both literal and figurative meanings. Literally, it means godmother and it is used as such in various fictional sources (see for example Boccaccio *Decameron* VII.10). Figuratively, since the term is applied to a male, instead of a female, it gains strong comical connotations. Gallarati, in “Sull’organizzazione del discorso comico nella produzione giocosa di Rustico Filippi,” *Medioevo Romanzo* 9.2 (1984): 189–213 summarizes possible readings of the term in its figurative sense: “vale, come già notato: a) ‘donnicciola’, ‘imbelle’, ‘chiacchierone’ . . . b) ‘omosessuale’, c) ‘ruffiano’” (193) [is equivalent to: a) petty woman, coward, loquacious. . . b) homosexual, c) pimp].

³⁰ Geoffrey of Vinsauf’s citation and English translation are from Ernest Gallo, *The Poetria Nova and Its Sources in Early Rhetorical Doctrine* (Paris: Mouton, 1971), 36–37.

³¹ Gallo, *The Poetria Nova*, 218.

laughter.³² The interrelation between humor and ridicule in a poem was thus essential for both a successful performance and a persuasive argument.

Ridicule and humor are thus both standard elements that collaborate closely in invective poetry. Consequently, ridicule has an important place in the process of the creation and delivery of a poem, becoming an element as important as the hostile language itself. In the same way, Rustico does not seem to use a generic rhetorical structure merely to cause disdain in target readers. On the contrary, through mockery, sarcasm, and irony he most likely sought to elicit in his readers and listeners a type of laughter that could be understood at different levels (i.e., within a political, social, and ethical frame).

Modern scholarship has not yet offered an in-depth assessment of the relation in Rustico's invectives between rhetoric and ethics, both of which are expressed through the comic style and the direction of indignation at specific moral faults. In the case of "A voi, che ve ne andaste," critics have specifically identified sarcasm and irony.³³ The sonnets "Fastel, messer fastidio de la cazza" and "A voi, messere Iacopo comare" have been considered ironic and derisive.³⁴ In general, the humor in these invectives, discernible in the opening lines and in their overall content, has been recognized and associated by these critics with the goal of blaming specific faults. But we need to go further and examine in detail how Rustico employs humor to convey an ethical message articulated through that irony, sarcasm, and ridicule. In what follows, I will examine the relative ethical weight of blame and humor, evaluating Rustico's poetics and ethics in light of the specific ideological, political and historical references contained in these poems. Each sonnet condemns the faults of specific individuals and groups. Through allusion and exaggeration, these faults gain a comic value expressed through sarcasm or irony. They also reveal the indignation of Rustico who reprehends and mocks the addressees, requiring that we also consider the dynamic of laughter on the part of the implied audience.

³² See Alfie, "Yes...but was it funny?" in the present volume.

³³ For glosses on Rustico's sarcasm see Marti, *Poeti giocosi*, 35 and Levin, *Rustico di Filippo*, 35. For general annotations on Rustico's irony, see Massèra, *Sonetti burleschi*, 403; Mengaldo, *Rustico Filippi*, 26; Marrani, "I sonetti di Rustico," 147.

³⁴ For comments in relation to the ironic value of these two sonnets, see Marti, *Poeti giocosi*, 34; Marrani, "I sonetti di Rustico," 182. Few critics have mentioned their derisive content, see Marti, *Poeti giocosi*, 44; Gallarati, *Rustico Filippi*, 145.

“A voi, che ve ne andaste per paura”³⁵

Rustico's most renowned invective, “A voi, che ve ne andaste per paura,” addresses a well-defined political group identifiable with the Guelphs. The sonnet is exemplary in reproving specific faults while employing both *indignatio* and ridicule. The placement of the noun “paura” [fear (1)] at the end of the opening line immediately launches a straightforward attack. Such an emphatic term, unequivocally qualifying the verb “ve ne andaste” [you who fled (1)], gives a derisive tone to the opening statement. It also constitutes a double allusion to a cowardice both blameworthy and laughable.

In order to understand better Rustico's humor and his ethics of vituperation, we must be aware of the historical background of the invective. Since this sonnet contains apparent references to the battles of Montaperti (1) and Benevento (2), critics commonly agree that it was written after the Battle of Benevento, when the exiled Guelphs were returning to Florence six years after their defeat at the Battle of Montaperti (1260) and April 17, 1267, when the Florentine Ghibellines announced their submission to Pope Clement IV.³⁶ Rustico launches an invective against a comprehensive group of Guelphs addressed with the pronoun “a voi” [to you, 1], accusing them of cowardice in battle (1), opportunism (2–3), spitefulness (7–8), and arrogance (14):

A voi, che ve ne andaste per paura
sicuramente potete tornare;
da che ci è dirizzata la ventura,
ormai potete guerra inconinzare.

4

E più non vi bisogna stare a dura,³⁷

³⁵ All of Rustico's sonnets are taken from Silvia Gallarati's critical edition *Rustico Filippi: Sonetti satirici e giocosi* (2005). Gallarati's edition, though based on Giuseppe Marrani's *I sonetti di Rustico di Filippi* (1999) which maintains the original meter and spelling of Ms. Vat. 3793 (all modern spelling variations are in square brackets), provides the variants from the later codex Vaticano Latino 4823. English translations of Rustico's sonnets are mine.

³⁶ See Massera, *Sonetti burleschi*, 403; Maurizio Vitale, *Rimatori comico-realistici del Due e Trecento* (Turin: Utet, 1956), 116.

³⁷ As Vitale notes in *Rimatori comico-realistici I*, the expression “stare a dura” is also used by the thirteenth-century poet Guido Guinizelli with the sense “di resistere, stando sulle difese” (117) [to resist, staying on the defense]. See also Mengaldo, *Rustico Filippi*, 26. Here Mengaldo confirms Vitale's observation, adding an additional source by Francesco de Barberino's *Documenti d'Amore*. The fourteenth-century chronicler Marchionne di Coppo Stefani (1336–1385) also uses an expression with a similar meaning in his *Cronaca fiorentina* (ca. 1378–1385): “I Cerchi vollono che così facessero i loro come che avessono da pagare e stare alla dura con loro” (81 emphasis added); see his *Cronaca Fiorentina*, ed. Niccolò Rodolico *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores: Raccolta degli storici italiani dal Cinquecento al Millecinquecento ordinata da L.A. Muratori XXX.I*, [Città del Castello: Unione Arti Grafiche, 1903]. Antonio Bazzarini's *Ortografia enciclopedia universale della lingua*

da che nonn-è chi vi scomunicare:
 ma ben lo vi tenete 'n sciagura
 che non avete piú cagion che dare. 8

Ma so bene, se Carlo fosse morto,
 che voi ci trovereste ancor cagione;
 però del papa nonn-ho gran conforto. 11

Ma io non voglio con voi stare a tenzone,
 ca-llungo temp'è ch'io ne fui accorto
 che 'l ghibellino aveste per garzone. 14

[O you who fled out of fear / you can safely return; / since fortune has turned for us, / now you can start war. / And no need to stay tough anymore, / because there's no one to excommunicate there. / But you consider it a great misfortune / that you have no more cause to make trouble. / But I know well, if [King] Charles had died, / that you would still find cause; / so I do not find much reassurance in the Pope. / But I do not wish to go on arguing with you, / because I realized a long time ago / that you took the Ghibelline for a servant.]

According to most critics, Rustico's poem can be understood as a direct attack against a generic group of Guelphs identifiable with the ones who fled from Florence after the battle of Montaperti (1260).³⁸ Vittorio Cian is more specific when he proposes that the Guelphs who fled from Florence "erano fuggiti, per paura, a Lucca, ed ora, passato ogni pericolo, erano ritornati a fare la voce grossa per le piazze, mostrandosi spavalidi e millantatori contro i Ghibellini, scorati e fiaccati dopo Benevento" [run away, out of fear, to Lucca, and now, after all the dangers were behind them, they returned boastfully to all the squares, acting as swashbucklers and boasters against the Ghibellines, discouraged and weakened after Benevento].³⁹ Rustico addresses them with both scorn and sarcasm, reminding them that they fled ("andaste," 1) from Florence out of fear ("per paura," 1). Due to the change in their fortunes ("ventura," 3), the exiled Guelphs

italiana Vol. 2 D-K (Venice: Girolamo Tasso, 1824) confirms that the expression is still in use during the nineteenth century with a similar meaning: "fare resistenza con tutte le sue forze . . . star duro, ostinarsi (Gelli)" (19) [To resist with all strengths . . . stay tough, persist].

³⁸ See Mengaldo, *Rustico Filippi*, 26.

³⁹ Cian, *La satira*, 137. For more information on the Guelph expatriates in Lucca, see Robert Davidsohn, *Storia di Firenze* 2.1 "Guelfi e Ghibellini: lotte sveve" 1900, trans. Giovanni Battista Klein and Roberto Palmarocchi (Firenze: Sansoni, 1956), 730. Julia Holloway in *Twice-Told Tales: Brunetto Latino and Dante Alighieri* (New York: Peter Lang, 1993) seems to be the only critic to propose that Rustico wrote "A voi, che ve ne andaste" to Brunetto Latini: "Rustico di Filippo wrote, perhaps in reply, though it appears more to be addressed in connection with Charles of Anjou, a *tenzone*" (79).

can now make their comeback to Florence after their banishment from the city (2), and once safely returned, they can start another war (4). They should not be on the defensive because there is no one left to excommunicate in Florence, since all the Ghibellines are defeated (5–6). This fact saddens the Guelphs only because they cannot bring any further grief to the Ghibellines (7–8). Rustico then intervenes in the first person to state that he knows well that if the Guelph protector King Charles of Anjou had died in the battle, instead of the Ghibellines' champion Manfredi, the Guelphs would keep complaining and would encourage the pope to issue a global excommunication of all Ghibellines (9–10). Rustico then turns his criticism on the present pope who, in his opinion, was not a fair leader (11). He concludes his invective by declaring that he does not wish to engage them in a poetic *tenzone* or debate, because the arrogant Guelphs will only treat the Ghibellines as their subordinates (12–14).

Supplying a more precise historical background allows a modern reader to gain a richer understanding of the two poles of blame and humor contained in this invective. The references to an imminent war (4), excommunication (6), and the pope (11) can be linked to specific historical events documented between 1266–1267. To my knowledge, the last verse of the first quatrain, “ormai potete guerra inconinzare” (4) [now you can start war], has not been linked to any specific historical event, but I believe that I can identify one: The invasion by the shared forces of Guelphs and Angevin troops which occurred in Florence not long after the Battle of Benevento. This invasion was in the collective thoughts of many Florentines a year before it actually occurred (and even before the Battle of Benevento) because of a significant episode which occurred in January 1266. This episode is relevant because it constituted a significant event for the build-up to war between Guelphs and Ghibellines.

In January 1266, a month before the Battle of Benevento, King Charles of Anjou was crowned emperor in Rome and the expatriate Guelphs began their reprisal against the Ghibellines in the crucial battle of Castelnuovo di Valdarno.⁴⁰ During this battle the Guelph chief of Castelnuovo, Uberto Spiovanati Pazzi, concocted an apocryphal letter that he purposely caused to fall into the hands of the Ghibellines. The letter claimed the imminent arrival of an Angevin army of 800 French soldiers to defend the Guelphs in Castelnuovo, seize Florence, and expel all the Florentine Ghibellines.⁴¹ Based on this false information the Ghibellines immediately retreated from Castelnuovo, abandoning their siege. The episode significantly

⁴⁰ See Giovanni Villani, “Cronica di Giovanni Villani” *Croniche di Giovanni, Matteo e Filippo Villani secondo le migliori stampe e corredate di note filologiche e storiche*, Biblioteca Classica Italiana: Secolo XIV, 21 (Trieste: Sezione Letterario-Artistica del Lloyd Austriaco, 1857), 116.

⁴¹ For more details on this historical event, see Villani, “Cronica,” 7.12; Davidsohn, *Storia di Firenze* 2.1, 801.

discredited the Ghibellines, not only morally—in that the deception caused them great loss of face—but also politically, since it encouraged further Guelph uprisings in various Tuscan Ghibelline strongholds. The integrity and political authority of the Ghibellines thus began to be questioned.

The news of the defeat of King Manfredi at Benevento and the Guelph conspiracy to invade Florence soon reached both the Ghibellines and the Florentine people, so that considerable turmoil erupted in the city. Although the letter was a forgery, the idea of the imminent arrival of King Charles's forces constituted a reasonable threat for the Ghibellines, especially because the precise number of 800 French soldiers coincided with King Manfredi's 800 soldiers who defeated the Guelphs at the Battle of Montaperti in 1260.⁴² The putative arrival of the Guelph and Angevin troops was more than plausible as a calculated vendetta, and indeed it actually occurred (with the exact number of 800 French soldiers) in April 1267.

I would suggest then that the expression "ormai potete guerra inconinzare" (4) could likely refer to the "imminent" invasion by the shared forces of Guelphs and Angevin troops. If so, this phrase—directed toward an undisclosed Guelph or Guelphs—assumes not merely a tone of abstract irony or sarcasm, but one of both condemnation and derision in a specific historical context. As he stands in the soon-to-be-invaded Florence, Rustico sardonically seems to note how the tables are now turned against him, "da che ci è dirizzata la ventura" (3) and, as in a game of "zara" or dice, the Guelphs now have won their bet.⁴³ Their imminent victory over the Ghibellines is thus simply a matter of luck ("ventura," 3), not merit. The verb "drizzare" (3) implies a change of course which leads to the correct path (as in the compound verb "addrizzare" or "indirizzare").

Consequently, it also involves the action of adapting oneself opportunistically to the new course of action that has changed for everyone. Rustico therefore derisively blames a group of Guelphs (or a single Guelph) for taking advantage of the positive outcome of the battle of Benevento. He thus ironically criticizes this change of course, since fortune is not described as "diritta" [straight or just], but rather "dirizzata" [set straight].⁴⁴ Both Guelphs and Ghibellines, "ci è" (3), are not necessarily heading toward destiny via a secure right path ("diritta"), which will lead all to peace. Instead, Rustico seems to imply that they are venturing toward an adjusted version of justice ("dirizzata"), which only fits the moment and will

⁴² See Davidsohn, *Storia di Firenze* 2.1, 692.

⁴³ See also Dante's *Purgatorio* where the imagery of the dice game opens Canto VI and parallels the pilgrim's political invective launched against Italy and its citizens who have abandoned her in a situation of chance and division. Dante, *Purgatorio* 6, 1–12.

⁴⁴ See Giuseppe Bonghi's *Arcaismi del Due-Trecento*: "dreçar," correggere [Uguccione da Lodi, *Il libro*, 250: pregai lo Re de Gloria / qe ve degne dreçar], raddrizzare.
http://www.classicalitaliani.it/glossari/glossario_medioevo_01.htm (last accessed on Jan. 30, 2010).

inevitably lead to more war, confusion, and destruction for all Florentines. If the “guerra” (4) in question refers to the imminent factual Angevin invasion of Florence, instead of an unspecified war that might be begun by the Guelphs, the verse, from Rustico’s perspective, would become more historically pointed and thus more aggressively irreverent toward the Guelphs. These historical events brought devastation to the Ghibellines and crucial changes in favor of the Guelphs. However, these victories were not direct consequences of the Guelphs’ merit or courage, but were rather products of treachery (i.e., the battle of Castelnuovo) and opportunism (i.e., the 1267 Angevin invasion of Florence, successful only thanks to King Charles’ aid). With the first quatrain, then, Rustico launches an attack both grave and derisive against a target which—although indefinite—is well defined within an historical frame.

The verb “scomunicare” (6), linked to the pope and King Charles in the second quatrain, may help us add more specific and historically relevant referents to the existing critical interpretation. Before the Battle of Benevento, Pope Clement IV, worried about King Manfredi’s advance in Tuscany and the presence of German troops in Florence, took harsh measures against the Florentine Ghibellines. He first revived the office of the inquisition (headquartered in the Church of Santa Croce in Florence), declared all of King Manfredi’s followers to be heretics, and reinstated the previous pope’s excommunication of prominent Ghibellines in Florence, who were thus barred from receiving the sacraments and a proper Christian burial.⁴⁵ After the Ghibellines’ defeat at Benevento in 1266, King Charles of Anjou, also solicited by the pope, ordered that King Manfredi be buried on a riverbank under the Benevento bridge, away from papal land, since he was excommunicate.⁴⁶

This disrespect was also paired with harsh vituperation, as documented in a letter by Pope Clement IV that refers to Manfredi’s body as the “puzzolente cadavere dell’uomo pestilenziale” [stinking corpse of the pestilential man].⁴⁷ The pope’s strategy was successful indeed: he brought the Ghibellines to retreat and “convert” to Guelphism and became “Signore supreme della città.” [Supreme lord of the city]⁴⁸ These events, which occurred between October 1266 and January 1267, show how the pope used excommunication as both a religious and a political weapon to favor the Guelphs, to facilitate the rise of King Charles in Tuscany, and

⁴⁵ See Davidsohn, *Storia di Firenze* 2.1, 794–96.

⁴⁶ See Villani, “Cronica,” 115; cfr. Dino Compagni, *La cronica di Dino Compagni delle cose occorrenti ne’ tempi suoi*, ed. Isidoro Del Lungo. *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores*, 9 (Città del Castello: Lapi, 1916), pt. 2.12; The episode is also cited by Dante in *Purgatorio* 3, 127–32.

⁴⁷ Cited in Davidsohn, *Storia di Firenze* 2.1, 804.

⁴⁸ Davidsohn, *Storia di Firenze* 2.1, 817. Luigi Russo in “Nota aggiunta” (Massera, *Sonetti burleschi*, 399–412) suggests the idea of the Ghibellines “converting” to Guelphism (403).

to secure the Church's position of leadership in the *comune* not only over the Ghibellines but also over the party of the *popolani*.⁴⁹

In this context, then, the lines "E più non vi bisogna stare a dura, / da che nonn-è chi vi scomunicare" (5–6) could be a possible reference to the period between October 1266 and January 1267. If this is true, we could speculate that the sonnet might have been written after these events and almost certainly before April 1267. The reason why Guelphs should not be on the defensive ("non vi bisogna stare a dura," 5) is that there is no one to excommunicate in Florence.⁵⁰ Rustico might imply, jokingly, that now all the Florentines (including Ghibellines and *popolani*) are like pseudo-Guelphs, and thus the pope cannot excommunicate anyone anymore. This allusion could also be a subtle attack on Rustico's own Ghibelline compatriots who have "converted" their political faith and changed position to effect an opportunistic alliance with the pope. Such "conversion" is confirmed by historical evidence, especially in the induction ceremony of the new Guelph

⁴⁹ The alliance of prominent Ghibellines, such as Guido Novello, with the Pope lasted until January 1267. During this time, the *popolo fiorentino* revolted against the government and a new magistracy was created. Thirty-six citizens (including some former Guelphs who had never expatriated and representatives from the people) constituted this magistracy, and popular rule was restored. See Villani, "Cronica," 7.14; For a concise account on the event, see Louis Green, "Florence," *The New Cambridge Medieval History*. Volume V ca. 1198–ca.1300, ed. David Abulafia (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 479–96; here 487. These developments yielded a truce between Guelphs and Ghibellines. The truce was a time of relative peace sealed by many marriages between Guelph and Ghibelline party members; See Compagni, *La cronica*, 12. However, political tensions between noble Guelph and Ghibelline families still existed in the city. Finally, on April 17 1267, the troops comprised of exiled Florentine Guelphs and Angevin soldiers, led by Count Guglielmo di Monforte, approached and seized the city; all the Ghibellines departed from Florence permanently. Noble Guelphs gradually reinstated their aristocratic government in association with the papacy. For more information on these events, see Davidsohn, *Storia di Firenze* 2.1, 845–48, and Massimo Tarassi "Il breve ed effimero periodo popolare" in Raveggi et al., *Ghibellini, guelfi e popolo grasso*, 75–90. Najemy, in *A History of Florence: 1200–1575* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006) notes: "the Guelfs got their revenge, exiling Ghibellines and confiscating their property, which was sold and divided among the Guelf party" (74–75).

⁵⁰ Almost all critics, such as Vitale and Marrani, agree that the "vi" in verse 5 is an unstressed pronoun identifiable as a "dativo etico" (Marrani, "I sonetti di Rustico," 148) or as a "particella pronominale in funzione avverbiale" (Vitale, *Rimatori comico-realistici* I, 117). Both critics interpret it as used merely to emphasize the verb and thus translate the sentence as "non vi è chi dobbiate scomunicare" [there is no one you need to excommunicate] (Marti, *Poeti giocosi*, 35). Mengaldo, in *Rustico Filippi*, suggests that "vi" could refer to the Guelphs instead, and thus it could be read as "who excommunicate you" (26). However, since the verb is in the infinitive ("scomunicare"), I think that the preferable interpretation would be the one that does not rearrange the order of the words and avoids linking the pronoun "vi" to the verb "è" [to be], which are not contiguous in the original sentence. Instead, "vi" is contiguous to the verb "scomunicare" and as such could be intended as a locative adverb, i.e., *there*, dependent on the infinitive verb and indicating a location (avverbio di luogo): there's no one to excommunicate *there* ("nonn-è chi vi scomunicare"). The expression "there" almost certainly refers to the site where Rustico launches his invective, i.e., Florence.

government established in April 1266. During this time, the excommunication of prominent Ghibellines was withdrawn publicly by Cardinal Ottaviano degli Ubaldini who was solicited to do so by Pope Clement IV:

Dopo che la città fu riconsacrata dal cardinale . . . i singoli Ghibellini personalmente scomunicati si affollarono per ricevere l'assoluzione; tra i primi fu quel farmacista Omodeo, che ogni rivolgimento si trovava alla testa di tutti, insieme con suo figlio Jacopo che vestiva l'abito ecclesiastico.⁵¹

[After the city was reconsecrated by the cardinal . . . the individual Ghibellines who were personally excommunicated crowded together in order to receive the absolution; among the first ones there was that pharmacist named Omodeo, who during every upheaval was in front of everybody, together with his son Jacopo who was wearing the ceremonial gown.]

Such a scenario of opportunism was further enhanced—reaching a level of amusing irony—by the fact that the man in charge to perform such conversion was Cardinal Ubaldino, who in earlier times had publicly declared his political Ghibelline faith so hyperbolically that he caused great uproar in Florence.⁵² The fourteenth-century scholar Benvenuto da Imola narrates vividly how the cardinal once described his loyalty to the Ghibellines in not strictly religious terms:

cum semel petiisset a ghibelinis Tusciae certam pecuniae quantitatem pro uno facto, et non obtinuisset, prorupit indignater et irate in hanc vocem: si anima est, ego perdidici ipsam millies pro ghibelinis (quoted in Singleton, 160).

[Once, when he asked the Tuscan Ghibellines for a certain sum of money he needed for something, and did not obtain it, he burst into these indignant and angry words: "If there be a soul, I have lost it a thousand times for the Ghibellines."]⁵³

Rustico's allusion of conversion to Guelphism in Florence also denigrates the current Pope Clement IV, who exhibits the same opportunism: "Però del papa nonn-ho gran conforto" (11) [I do not find much reassurance in the Pope].⁵⁴ The

⁵¹ Davidsohn, *Storia di Firenze* 2.1, 811. See also Del Lungo, "Un realista," 195–96. The English translation is mine.

⁵² As Henry D. Sedgwick in *Italy in the Thirteenth Century* Vol. II (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1912) has noted: "Ottaviano degli Ubaldini, a Florentine, who had been made cardinal twenty-five years before by Innocent IV, was famous for his sympathy with the Ghibellines . . . It was also said that he had rejoiced openly over the Guelph defeat at Montaperti" (74).

⁵³ Benvenuto's citation and English translation are from Charles Singleton, *The Divine Comedy: Inferno 2: Commentary* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970), 160. Dante places the cardinal Ubaldini in hell as an epicurean. Like Rustico, Dante could have mocked the once-Ghibelline cardinal's opportunism and the Florentine Ghibellines in general. This is evident by the fact that Dante places the cardinal with other prominent, hardcore Ghibellines such as Farinata degli Uberti; see *Inferno* 10, 120.

⁵⁴ This statement perhaps refers to the expected role of peacemaker of the pope and the clergy in general especially during wartime.

Guelphs are now ironically in an unhappy predicament, "sciagura" (7), because they cannot deliver their vendetta [cagion che dare, 8] against their new "brothers" the Ghibellines. The oddity of this circumstance becomes comical, and Rustico's accusation of opportunism, which seems now universally projected upon all parties and social groups, blends with humor.

The current friendship between Guelphs and Ghibellines is ironic—and almost prophetic—if we consider the conclusion of the invective. Having mockingly invited the Guelphs to come back to Florence in the opening lines ("ora potete tornare," 2), Rustico concludes:

Ma io non voglio con voi stare a tenzone,
Ca-llungo temp'è ch'io ne fui accorto
che 'l ghibellino aveste per garzone. (12–14)

[But I do not wish to go on arguing with you, / because I realized a long time ago / that you took the Ghibelline for a servant.]

The practice of Guelphs and Ghibellines writing invective poetry and debating, i.e., "stare a tenzone" (12), could be intended as an open exchange of ideas between members of opposing political parties. The association of *tenzoni* and invective is evident in the treatise *Fiore e vita di filosafi ed altri savi ed imperadori*, written during Rustico's time and recently attributed to Brunetto Latini, though always considered anonymous.⁵⁵ This work narrates the importance of philosophers and their teaching and underlines the importance of responding sagely to verbal attacks through *tenzoni*, also called *invettive*:

Al tempo di Tulio era Salustio, uno grande filosofo maldicente; e voleva grande male a Tullio. E fecero *tenzioni* insiem, che si chiamavano *invettive*, e biasimò l'uno l'altro."

[During the time of Cicero lived Salust, a great slanderous philosopher; and he hated Cicero. And both wrote *tenzoni* to each other, which were called *invectives*, and each blamed the other.]⁵⁶

The evidence of other *tenzoni* written by Rustico and other Tuscan poets, and recorded in Ms. Vat. 3793, confirms a situation of mutual correspondence and dialogue between poets associated with traditional political archenemies. All of Rustico's extant invectives, besides being physically associated with political *tenzoni* in the manuscript, could also be historically linked to the circle of Tuscan poets who lived during the late thirteenth century, such as Monte Andrea,

⁵⁵ Holloway, *Twice-Told Tales*, 530.

⁵⁶ The citation is from Cesare Segre, "I fiori e vita di filosafi ad altri savi ed imperadori," *La prosa del Duecento*, ed. Cesare Segre and Mario Marti (Milan: Ricciardi, 1959), 521–39; here 522. The English translation is mine.

Brunetto Latini, Bondie Dietaiuti, and Palamidesse di Bellindote.⁵⁷ In the closing tercet, however, Rustico again brings forward the reality of wartime and unmasks this pseudofriendship, crudely invoking his addressees. He shows that the conflict between the two parties is far from resolved. Poetry is paradoxically useless, because not even through writing or diplomatic means can the clash between Guelphs and Ghibellines be discussed and resolved. Now that the tables are turned in favor of the Guelphs, the gap between them is doomed to widen. The relations between the defeated “Ghibelline” Rustico, now treated as “garzone” (14), and a haughty Guelph winner can only degenerate, since the latter will not hesitate to humiliate and topple the former. This final note could also refer to the rumor of the coming of the Angevin troops to Florence, and the anticipated Ghibelline defeat that caused the permanent separation between the two parties.

The final tercet could also be intended as an explicit attack launched by Rustico against Guelph poets. Rustico could sardonically declare that what is ineffective and useless is not poetry in general but more specifically the poetry of his adversaries. In this context, the refusal to engage in a *tenzone* might more explicitly aim to ridicule the bad faith of the Guelph addressees. Due to their pride they are not able to produce a fair reply “per le rime,” so Rustico declines in advance to reply to any further invective written and received from any Guelph. Rustico could be referring to prominent Guelph exiles such as Brunetto Latini or Guglielmo Beroardi.⁵⁸ Ser Beroardo, in particular, went into exile in 1260 while being on ambassadorial duty, like Latini, and exchanged *tenzoni* with various Florentine poets, both Guelphs and Ghibellines.⁵⁹ One of his sonnets, in particular, seems to echo Rustico’s “A voi che ve ne andaste” as it launches a sardonic remark positioned at the last tercet as well:

Le battaglie non son come sonetti,
 chè pugnono li ferri più, che spine;
 Però non son sentenze li tuo' detti. (12-14)

⁵⁷ See Gianfranco Folena, “Cultura poetica dei primi fiorentini,” *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana* 147 (1970): 1–42; also Massera, “Tenzoni politiche fiorentine” *Sonetti burleschi* 39–56.

⁵⁸ Holloway, *Twice-Told Tales*, 79.

⁵⁹ Massera, *Sonetti burleschi*, 46–56. See also Frede Jensen, *Tuscan Poetry of the Duecento: An Anthology* (New York and London: Garland, 1994): “Guglielmo Beroardi (was the) son of Ruggerino Bero(v)ardi; Guglielmo is identified by Folena as a Guef judge and lawyer. . . In 1260, he is sent as ambassador of the Guefs to Corradino to solicit help to weaken or destroy the power of Manfredi and his ally Siena. While on a mission to Corradino’s uncle, the powerful Duke Ludwing of Bavaria, he received word of defeat of the Guefs at Montaperti and went into exile” (xxv). As Jensen notes additionally, Beroardi also returned to his homeland after the Battle of Benevento in 1266 and “resumed his political activities in Florence” (xxv).

[Battles are not like sonnets / because swords hurt more than thorns; / so your words are not sentences.]⁶⁰

By pairing war and poetry, Ser Beroardo underlines the difference between the reality of wartime and sonnet writing, and questions the poetic ability of his addressees to respond successfully to his political *tenzone*.

In a similar context Rustico's concluding attack could be interpreted not only as a bitter criticism of the current relations between Guelphs and Ghibellines in Florence, but also (besides its strictly historical and political implications) as a provocative call issued by Rustico to another recipient poet(s) expected to react and respond to the invective. In this perspective, the poem as a whole offers a glimpse into the culture of writing and exchanging invective poetry in thirteenth-century Tuscany. Although Rustico declares an immense discrepancy between Guelphs and Ghibellines, he does not necessarily apply it to himself and to his addressees. "A voi, che ve ne andaste," by denouncing a specific historical circumstance, does not necessarily serve as a political statement or propaganda *in favor* of the Ghibellines. In fact, Rustico shares with the addressees of the invective a common interest (being a poet who writes to other poets), as well as a common concern (the good of the *comune* of Florence now undergoing grave strain). Although Rustico and his addressees are affiliated with opposing political parties, the ethos of civic responsibility and unity that emerges (although through irony) in the creed of the *comune* confirms the existence of a shared belief expressed between poets from enemy parties.

The battles of Montaperti and Benevento inspired several Tuscan poets who wrote various thirteenth-century invectives comparable to Rustico's. Two of these are Guittone d'Arezzo's "Ahi lasso, or è stagione de doler tanto" and Chiaro Davanzati's "Ahi dolze e gaia terra fiorentina."⁶¹ If we compare the content of these two poems it is clear that in the vein of Rustico's "A voi, che ve ne andaste" they reach both Guelphs and Ghibellines. Like Guittone and Davanzati, Rustico expresses the link between poetry and ethics through the condemnation of warfare and opportunism. However, Guittone and Davanzati's invectives emerge as more severe accusations of the Florentines than Rustico's sonnet, because they contain far less—indeed very little—humor and employ the more lofty poetic form of the

⁶⁰ Massera, *Sonetti burleschi*, 47. Although the term the term "sentenza" has a broad semantic field, such as judgment, aphorism, decision, etc.; see for example Pietro Lombardi's *Sententiae* or sayings, I translate the term as "sentence", i.e., judicial sentence, because it better fits in the context of the invective and verbal attack launched in a court setting.

⁶¹ Guittone's *canzone* was written most likely after the Battle of Montaperti, and Davanzati's after the battle of Benevento. For Guittone, see Contini, *Poeti del Duecento* vol. I (Milan: Ricciardi, 1960), 20–23; for Davanzati, Contini, *Poeti* vol. II, 228–30.

canzone.⁶² Instead, by using the form of the sonnet, Rustico conveys more briefly and unceremoniously his ethical message through a vibrant mockery and sarcastic humor that more immediately compels to readers through humor and laughter, while at the same time distinguishing his own invective and political voice.

“A voi, messer Iacopo comare.”

Although there is no explicit connection between “A voi, che ve ne andaste per paura,” “A voi, messere Iacopo comare,” and “Fastel, messer fastidio de la cazza” critics such as Massera, Marti, Vitale, and Mengaldo have re-arranged and juxtaposed them based on similarities in theme and content. Their anthologies combine these three sonnets at the opening of their collections.⁶³ Massera, who began the process of reorganization, believed that they formed a sort of triptych, which he considered a uniform sequential unit of politically-based poetry written in chronological order close to the battle of Benevento.⁶⁴ Roncaglia (1945), Levin (1986) and more recently Marrani (1999) note that any rearrangement of Rustico’s corpus constitutes a significant distortion of the original order from Vat. 3793.⁶⁵ Marti’s hypothesis that this sonnet was written before the battle of Benevento thus requires scrutiny, given that it is based on Massera’s questionable re-arrangement of the original manuscript order.⁶⁶ “A voi, messer Iacopo,” should be therefore interpreted independently of “A voi, che ve ne andaste” and “Fastel, messer

⁶² Cécile Le Lay’s recent study “Invective et ironie chez Guittone d’Arezzo,” *L’invective: Histoire, formes, stratégies*, Actes du colloque international ed. Agnès Morini (Saint-Étienne: Publications de l’Université de Saint-Étienne, 2006), 13–20 examines the role of irony and sarcasm in Guittone’s “Ahi lasso” and confirms the grave tone used by Guittone which suggests that humor does not play a significant role in the poem (15). Levin, in *Rustico di Filippo*, briefly discusses “Guittone’s bitter sarcasm against the Ghibellines” in the same canzone (35).

⁶³ See Massera who lists in order “A voi, che ve ne andaste,” “Fastel, messer fastidio,” and “A voi, messer Iacopo” (*Sonetti burleschi*, 1–2). Instead, Marti rearranged the order following his study “Revisione” and places “A voi, messer Iacopo comare” before “Fastel, messer fastidio” and “A voi, che ve ne andaste” because “risultano disposti secondo un ordine più strettamente logico e cronologico” (*Poeti giocosi*, 31). Vitale lists first “A voi, che ve ne andaste” and follows Marti’s rearrangement listing “A voi, messere Iacopo” before “Fastel, messer fastidio.” See Vitale, *Rimatori comico realistici* 1, 117–122. Mengaldo’s anthology also follows Marti’s reorganization (23–27). All these anthologies, though they slightly differ from one another for the ordering of the three poems, consider these sonnets as a triptych.

⁶⁴ Massera, *Sonetti burleschi*, 321. For a general overview, see Marrani, “I sonetti di Rustico,” 147.

⁶⁵ Aurelio, Roncaglia “Correzioni al testo delle Rime di Rustico di Filippo,” *Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa* 13 (1946): 201–205; Levin, *Rustico di Filippo*, 12–14; Marrani, “I sonetti di Rustico,” 59–66.

⁶⁶ See Marti “Discussioni, conferme, correzioni sui poeti giocosi,” *Realismo dantesco e altri studi* (Milan: Ricciardi, 1961), 156–86.

fastidio," as it is directed against another target, within a different referential frame.⁶⁷

"A voi, messer Iacopo" also alludes to the tensions between Guelphs and Ghibellines though less pointedly than "A voi, che ve ne andaste." It has been considered a political sonnet written against the Ghibelline Iacopo, who is exhorted by Rustico to perpetrate a just vengeance against his enemies.⁶⁸ The main theme of the sonnet is indeed vendetta, or more precisely the failure to undertake a just vendetta; the speaker's offer to take vengeance on Iacopo's behalf is the comic key that opens the mockery of Iacopo's⁶⁹:

A voi, messer Iacopo comare
Rustico s'acomanda fedelmente
e dice, se vendetta avete a fare,
ch'e' la farà di buon cuor lèalmente. 4

Ma piaceriagli forte che 'l parlare
e-rider vostro fosse men sovente,
ché male perdere uom, che guadagnare,
suole schifare più la mala gente. 8

E forte si cruc[ci]ò di monna Nese
quando sonett'e'udì di lei novello;
e credel dimostrar tosto in palese. 11

Ma troppo siete conto di Fastello,
fino a tanto ch'egli ha danar da spese:
ond'e' si crede bene esser donzello. 14

[To you, Sir Iacopo "godmother," / Rustico commends himself / and says that if you have vengeance to take, / he will gladly do it faithfully. / But he [Rustico] would greatly appreciate it / if you would limit your chatting and laughter, / because a bad loser, not a winner / is usually what the enemies hate. / And he [Rustico] was greatly upset with Lady Nese / when he heard a new sonnet about her / and thinks he will show that openly right away. / But you are too intimate with Fastello, / as long as he has money to spend; / so he firmly believes that he's quite the lad.]

The sonnet features the structure of the *ars dictaminis* by opening with the *salutatio*, "A voi, messer Iacopo comare" (1), which also identifies Rustico as the writer of the message ("Rustico s'acomanda," 2). As Levin notes, "the formulae prescribed by the various *artes dictandi* for the composition of epistles are recognizable . . . the

⁶⁷ Massera believes that both sonnets mention a different Fastello; Massera, *Sonetti burleschi*, 369.

⁶⁸ See Marti, *Poeti giocosi*, 33; Vitale, *Rimatori comico-realistici* 1, 119; Recently, other critics confirm this interpretation. See Menotti Stanghellini, *Rustico Filippi: I trenta sonetti realistici* (Siena: Accademia dei Rozzi, 2004), 20.

⁶⁹ Marrani, "I sonetti di Rustico," 153; Levin, *Rustico di Filippo*: "Vendetta is also the theme of a sonnet articulated in the form of an epistle" (95).

salutation . . . indicates both the receiver and the writer of the letter."⁷⁰ This formula is strikingly similar to other sources contemporary to Rustico in the opening of didactic works such as Latini's *Tesoretto*: "Io, burnetto latino . . . a voi mi raccomando" [I, Brunetto Latini . . . Commend myself to you] or in formal letters such as the one written in June 1305 by Sienese merchants: "Messere Ghoro e Ghontieri; Ghuccio e Franciesco vi si racomanda e salute" [Messer Goro and Gontieri; Guccio and Francesco commend themselves to you and greet you].⁷¹

The opening line not only introduces the target of the invective but also establishes *indignatio* through an irreverent tone by associating the masculine proper noun "Iacopo" with the feminine common noun "comare." The term "comare" usually designates a godmother or female acquaintance (e.g., Boccaccio *Decameron* 7.10), but is here instead applied to a male figure and placed strategically at the end of the opening verse to sardonically qualify the addressee, in a comically and allusive way, as effeminate, loquacious, indecisive, and irresolute. Though jokily applied to a masculine noun, it also might imply a political partnership between Iacopo and Rustico, since both were affiliated in some way with the Ghibelline party.

These implicit accusations are explicitly revealed in the second quatrain. Here critics such as Vitale have stressed the strong political undertone.⁷² The reference is introduced by the term "mala gente" that denotes the Guelphs, i.e., Iacopo's enemies.⁷³ Rustico seems to encourage Iacopo to be more politically active, because if he persists with his excessive chatting and joking (5–6), he will act just like a Guelph loser (8). Guelphs, as followers of the Tuscan proverb "é meglio non acquistare che perdere," prefer to avoid losing badly [perder malamente], so they

⁷⁰ Levin, *Rustico di Filippo*, 96–97.

⁷¹ Brunetto Latini's citation and translation are from *Il tesoretto*, ed. and trans. Julia Bolton Holloway (New York and London: Garland, 1981), 6–7. The citation of the 1305 Sienese letter is from Cesare Paoli and Enea Piccolomini, *Lettere volgari del secolo XIII scritte da senesi* (Bologna: Romagnoli, 1871), 71. The English translation of the Sienese letter is mine.

⁷² See Vitale, *Rimatori comico-realistici*, 119.

⁷³ See Marti, *Poeti giocosi*, 33; Mengaldo, *Rustico Filippi*, 22. To my knowledge, the only critics who disagree with this interpretation are Marrani and Rossi. Marrani interprets the term more generally as "malparlieri" (154), i.e., slanderers, avoiding any political connotation. Similarly, Rossi proposes the term "malfattori" (121), i.e., wrongdoers, thus intending the term as more morally oriented. The term could also refer to sodomites and derisively imply that Iacopo follows sodomitic practices. See Rossi, "I sonetti di Iacopo," 121. Other critics, such as Gallarati, agree, showing how this interpretation would give a gloss to the term *comare*; *Rustico*, 147. In my opinion, the political reference would supplement all these interpretations as it fits in the dispute between Iacopo and the Guelph Fastello, employed as a countermodel and symbol of "mala gente" and a bad influence for Iacopo. Stanghellini warns readers against any interpretation of the term "mala gente" devoid of any political connotation and subtly stresses the link between the term and the political tensions between Guelphs and Ghibellines prominent in Rustico's political invectives; see Stanghellini, *Rustico*, 19–20.

do not risk danger. Because they are afraid to lose their own lives, they flee from the battlefield.⁷⁴ By doing so, the Guelphs take no risks in the face of danger and, while avoiding any commitment, they neither earn any profit nor have to fear any loss (7–8). As Rossi notes, this proverbial declaration which ridicules a lack of determination could have been easily recognized by Rustico's original readers because revenge was often the expected response to disputes involving crimes.⁷⁵ In the two tercets, which serve as a *conclusio*, Rustico elaborates and confirms his criticism of Iacopo by introducing Monna Nese and Fastello. Monna Nese, the diminutive for Madonna Agnese, was perhaps Iacopo da Leona's wife.⁷⁶ Although some critics, like Mengaldo, propose that the grammatical subject of the tercet is Iacopo, the original manuscript reads "e forte si cruca di Madonna Nese" and not "crucciò" as in modern editions.⁷⁷ The verb "cruca" (9), modified by modern editors to *cruc[c]iò*, is in the third person and syntactically parallel to the following verb "credel" (11) from the same tercet and to the previous verbs "s'acomanda" (2), "farà" (4), and "piaceriagli" (5), where the subject is in all cases Rustico. Rustico, who speaks in the third person, first sarcastically offers himself as a friend to honor Iacopo's vendetta in his place (1–4), expresses his displeasure at his triviality and irresolution (3–8), and finally shows his exasperation at a scandal (perhaps involving and accusation of unchastity) surrounding Madonna Nese. As Rossi notes, in Iacopo da Leona's invective "Segnori, udite strano malificio" written against Rustico, in the final tercet, Iacopo ridicules him by using his wife in an analogous way (while also accusing him of being a cheapskate, beggar, sodomite, and thief).⁷⁸ With "A voi, messer Iacopo," Rustico almost certainly responds to Iacopo da Leona and reinforces his criticism at the close of the poem, adding a political reference in the following tercet.

In the last tercet, the verb "siete" (12) marks a switch from the third person to the second person, i.e., from Rustico to Iacopo. Iacopo is associated with an individual named Fastello, perhaps a reference to the Guelph Fastello de' Tosighi, whose house was damaged by the Ghibellines in 1266, or to the Guelph Fastello Rustichini who was exiled after the battle of Montaperti.⁷⁹ Other critics, such as

⁷⁴ See Marrani, "I sonetti di Rustico," 154. See also Compagni's saying—inspired by Cicero's *Tusc. Disp.*: "l'uomo savio non fa cosa che se ne penta" (*Cronica*, III.42).

⁷⁵ See Rossi, "I sonetti di Iacopo," 121.

⁷⁶ Cfr. Rossi, "I sonetti di Iacopo," 121.

⁷⁷ Marti, *Poeti giocosi*, 33.

⁷⁸ Rossi, "I sonetti di Iacopo," 121. For Iacopo da Leona's poem, "Segnori, udite strano malificio," see Marti, *Poeti giocosi*, 104.

⁷⁹ See Casini, "Un poeta umorista," 242; Federici, "I sonetti di Rustico," 50; Massera, *Sonetti burleschi*, 369; Rossi, "I sonetti di Iacopo," 122. The possibility that Fastello was a Guelph is confirmed by Rustico's sonnet "Fastel, messer fastidio de la cazza" where he is presented clearly as a Guelph when he "dibassa i ghebellini a dismisura" (2). There is a strong possibility that he was Fastello de' Tosighi, especially because Rustico names the family in "Il giorno avesse io mille marchi

Mengaldo, stress the possibility that it could be a nickname for “fascio di legna o d’altro” [a bundle of wood or of another material] a common expression in medieval Florentine vernacular which, if referred to a person, could be intended as a metaphor for excessive obesity, “grassezza squinternata.”⁸⁰ Fastello, depicted as an excessive eater, is accused of being a spendthrift and an egotist (13–14). He also aspires, as the phrase “ond’e’ si crede bene esser donzello” (14) suggests, to become a knight and thus wrongly believes he should be recognized as *messer*.⁸¹ The term “donzello,” if intended as “ragazzo giovane e piacente” [young and attractive boy], could also be intended ironically if associated with the term “fastello,” which identifies esthetic qualities in an individual that are quite the opposite of *piacente*: “probabilmente Fastello tanto giovane e piacente non era” [probably Fastello was not very young and attractive]⁸²

The hypothesis that the term “Fastello” might be a symbol or a generic nickname is plausible, but should be supplemented by other possible readings based on actual individuals and events. Historical references to individuals who lived during Rustico’s time should not be overlooked, at the risk of missing potential relevant political interpretations. It would be equally valid to interpret “Fastello” as both a symbol of overindulgence and a real individual, especially if we consider the expression “troppo siete conto” (12). This particular expression, which refers to the ambiguous relationship between Iacopo and Fastello, implies being too closely associated with someone. Critics unanimously recognize the equivocal tone of the expression that alludes to an intimate sexual relationship.⁸³ Both

d’oro” (11), further ridiculing his *casato*: “Fra gli altri partiremo li casati: / Donati ed Adimar sian del Capraccia; / di Donaton, *Tosinghi* e Giandonati (9–11, emphasis added) (Marrani, “I sonetti di Rustico,” 180).

⁸⁰ Mengaldo, *Rustico Filippi*, 22. Mengaldo consulted Olof Brattö’s “Studi di antroponimia fiorentina: i nomi meno frequenti del libro di Montaperti,” in *Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis* 61 (1955): 3–247; 97. I also found the term in Arrigo Castellani, *Nuovi testi fiorentini del Duecento con introduzione, trattazione linguistica e glossario*, vol.1 (Florence: Sansoni, 1952). This text confirms that “fastello” was used in 1295 to refer to a bunch of canes employed in economic transactions between Florentine merchants: “Anne dato lb. Vj e s. x, che nr’avemmo trentotto *fastella* di channe” (449, emphasis added) [they gave us six pounds and ten sacks, for we had thirty eight bundles of canes] (my translation). The term “fastello” or bundle indeed implies thickness and thus fatness, if a nickname. Other critics, such as Gallarati (in *Rustico Filippi*) speculate that the term might also contain sexual references and be a phallic metaphor; see Gallarati, *Rustico Filippi*, 148.

⁸¹ Cfr. Vitale, *Rimatori comico-realistici*, 120.

⁸² Gallarati, “Sull’organizzazione del discorso comico,” 194. Contini and Mengaldo read between the lines and qualify Fastello as an opportunist to the detriment of Iacopo, because mere economic (13) and social (14) interests motivate his friendship with Iacopo: See Contini, *Poeti del Duecento* II, 359; Mengaldo, *Rustico Filippi*, 22. Fastello’s aspiration to be perceived as a knight refers to his desire to advance in social rank. However, despite his aspirations, Fastello is wasting the riches that Iacopo is giving (or lending to) him.

⁸³ Marti, *Poeti giocosi*, 33.

possibilities—either that Iacopo or Fastello are accused of being sodomites, or that Fastello and Monna Nese are adulterous—are equally plausible. However, the references to “conto” (13) (associated with tallying) and “danar” (13) strongly suggest some economic relation between the two⁸⁴.

If we consider, in addition, that the individuals in question are affiliated with opposing political parties, a political implication emerges from this final tercet. Rustico accuses Iacopo of acting foolishly and of delaying a vendetta against the “mala gente,” his Guelph enemies. Rustico further elaborates on Iacopo's lack of political initiative by disclosing an ambiguous relation between the Ghibelline Iacopo and a Guelph Fastello (depicted comically as a countermodel of virtue—perhaps gluttonous, spendthrift, narcissistic and opportunistic). The close of the sonnet, therefore, further discredits Iacopo who, alongside the accusation of being limp and irresolute, is also ridiculed as opportunist because he associates with Fastello and has both economic—perhaps even sexual—ties with a political adversary.

In “A voi, messer Iacopo comare,” Rustico discloses reprehensible behaviors such as opportunism, cowardice and indolence, while combining them with vices pertaining to excesses, perhaps hinting even at sexual perversions. In doing so, Rustico employs subtle allusions through carefully chosen expressions that challenge modern readers because they involve multiple ways of interpretation. As a whole, this poem exemplifies Rustico's distinctive style, his complex humor, and his particular ethical and political stance toward his own contemporaries. If we seek to assess Rustico's humor we will be challenged even further. The humor that emerges from such a complex range of allusions and comic epithets suggests that the political and ethical message of the invective can also be linked to the lighter component of laughter.

As modern readers, we cannot claim that “A voi, messer Iacopo,” was written with no comic intention. Its allusive language and double entendre support the possibility that laughter was at least one of the intended reactions not only of Iacopo, but also in the implied audience of this text. On the other hand, it would be equally problematic to claim that the comic dimension of the invective is the only objective of the poem. Humor does not seem to function as a generic game that seeks laughter for its own sake. Though it is not stated explicitly, the sonnet lays out a message of moderation that is also applied significantly to laughter (“piaceriagli . . . che 'l parlare e rider vostro fosse men sovente,” 5–6).

For this reason, when we evaluate the humor of this sonnet we must be careful not to overemphasize the possible sexual references, as most recent critics do. For example, Gallarati's recent study (2005) thoroughly explores Rustico's ambivalent

⁸⁴ This is also Isidoro del Lungo's interpretation; see Del Lungo, “Un realista,” 200.

and multifaceted allusions in his comic corpus, but interprets the great majority of them as examples of a consistent jargon that is mainly sexually oriented. Although her study is weakened by this generalization, it also reaches some important conclusions concerning Rustico's originality and the dialogic nature of his poetry as it interacts with target readers.⁸⁵ Gallarati approaches these complex allusions as sexual and obscene jokes which merely serve a stylistic agenda useful to the poet himself, who seeks to demonstrate his poetic ability to readers in order to entertain them and gain their positive reception. She concludes that poems like "A voi, messer Iacopo comare" are not meant to communicate any ethical or serious stance to readers, but rather to stimulate a criticism against a general concept of inflexibility:

Non colgo in questi testi un atteggiamento moralistico. Rustico sembra sbeffeggiare e condannare non tanto presunti difetti, atteggiamenti, comportamenti sessuali e non (a seconda del piano di lettura), quanto l'irrigidimento, la fissità in determinati difetti, atteggiamenti e comportamenti.⁸⁶

[I do not see a moralistic attitude in these texts. Rustico seems not to mock and condemn alleged faults, attitudes, sexual and general behaviors (depending on the level of interpretations), but rather the rigidity, the fixity of specific faults, attitudes, and behaviors.]

Gallarati's study of the sexual connotations of Rustico's allusions should be seriously considered in any critical interpretation of the poet that seeks to be comprehensive. However, it should not be understood as the definitive reading, because to do so would limit an understanding of the didactic and serious value of Rustico's invectives and would also cause readers to overlook the complexity of Rustico's humor. Although Gallarati clearly delineates the ludic value of humor, she restricts it to a form of expression centered upon sexual references and amounting to a "gioco spregiudicato" (75), i.e., a game with no boundaries. In other words, Gallarati suggests that Rustico crafts a highly sophisticated lewd jargon without reservation because he does not seek to achieve any serious purpose. In my opinion the humor employed by Rustico is very complex but also flexible and as such it must be construed more seriously. Far from being a mere expression and provocation of amusement, Rustico's humor is deeply rooted in its own concrete environment.

Alongside sexual allusions, Rustico's mockery contains specific political allusions, which to be fully understood must be placed within the original historical and social context of the sonnet as well as within the intended ethical

⁸⁵ Gallarati, "Onomastica equivoca nei sonetti satirici di Rustico Filippi," *Cecco Angiolieri e la poesia satirica medievale*, 51–75; see especially 74–75.

⁸⁶ Gallarati, "Onomastica," 75. The English translation is mine.

message of reprehension as originally articulated by its author. In order to reach the most comprehensive reading, we must explore other dimensions of Rustico's humor, which include a political, ethical, social, and historical perspective. Being aware of such nuances equips us better to appreciate both the ethical weight and the humor of this invective, as they are both equally important and come into view through the fertile expressions of allusions which open instead of closing off the dialogue that existed and still exists between the poet and his readers.

Conclusion

My reading of Rustico's selected invectives stresses their historical, political, ethical, and ideological frame of reference of specific battles and conflicts during the second half of the thirteenth century. Each sonnet attacks and criticizes a target individual or group for specific excesses. The presence within the poems of both the poet-speaker and the addressee creates a dynamic tension between historical facts and poetic convention, stimulating a historically and politically oriented reading.

Each invective is crafted with a clear and cohesive use of metrical and rhetorical parameters according to the tradition of invective writing. In the two examples I have studied, Rustico condemns and ridicules his targets by using irony, biting sarcasm, and indignation. However, he never assumes the solemn and authoritative tone discernible in Guittone d'Arezzo and Chiaro Davanzati. As Levin has shown, in "A voi, che ve ne andaste" "there are no traces of Guittone's *planctus*" because the sonnet, "incisive, concentrated, direct, devoid of figural imagery, contrasts with Guittone's discursive and moralizing *canzone*. . . and even more so with a *canzone* written a few years after the battle of Benevento by Chiaro Davanzati."⁸⁷ By using the clear, compact, and direct form of the sonnet, Rustico places himself in the diplomatic stance of a poet between party lines, writing neither poetic lamentation (as Guittone does) or an elegy (as Davanzati does). Through his succinct, nearly brutal, unswerving sarcasm, Rustico creates a distinctive poetic language that qualifies his own personal style.

Most importantly, the grave tone of each of the invectives is leavened with a substantial dose of humor. Through laughter, the humor that emerges in these sonnets defuses hostility against their target, thus setting the ground for the possibility of dialogue between individuals from opposite parties and social groups. Rustico's invectives do not simply generate blind accusations for the sake of mere personal resentment and ridicule, nor relish a generic theoretical comic

⁸⁷ Levin, *Rustico di Filippo*, 36.

tradition for the sake of abstract intellectual enjoyment. Instead, because he shares common goals with his addressees concerning other fellow Florentines, Rustico directs his attacks across party lines through humor. Humor and laughter, therefore, serve as vehicles for ethical discourse because they moderate an excessively aggressive stance against the individuals and groups attacked.

In summary, Rustico's charges against the enemies of peace, unity, and stability in Florence finally invoke the ethos of civic responsibility and a longing for dialogue and unity. This dialogue emerges through irony and sarcasm, confirming the existence of a shared ideological belief expressed between poets from enemy parties but attached to the municipal ideology of the same *comune*. Rustico's invectives show us that in controversial times opposition presented with humor could bring a constructive and creative dialogue among enemies. Through humor he tries to build on the foundation of mutually shared beliefs while at the same time confronting with acid frankness those intransigent obstacles that are always the most pervasive and difficult to overcome.

Chapter 12

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*Tromdhámh Guaire: a Context for Laughter and Audience in Early Modern Ireland*¹

From the time of our earliest native written records, Irish, a member of the Celtic branch of the Indo-European language family, appears to have been the dominant language on the island of Ireland.² By no later than around the year 600 C.E., some 170 years (or five generations) after the first, official introduction of Christianity to at least *certain* parts of the country, the Irish had adapted the Latin alphabet to spell their own language, and had developed a distinctive script in which to write it, as attested, for example, by the Inse Goill standing stone, in County Galway.³

By this time, ca. 600, the Irish had begun to preserve, compose, and transmit a literature of their own. This new literature drew on some of the native pre-Christian traditions of the various indigenous groups who shared the island and is of no small significance in that it represented not a cultural clash but a symbiosis of a certain tranche of the native, pagan, orally-transmitted traditional lore with

¹ I wish to thank Professor Hildegard L. C. Tristram for reading a draft of this paper and for making a number of important corrections and comments.

² See James Patrick Mallory, "Language in Prehistoric Ireland," *Ulster Folklife* 45 (1999): 3–16; Gearóid Mac Eoin, "Linguistic Contacts in Ireland," *Die Leistung der Strataforschung und der Kreolistik*, ed. P. Sture Ureland. Symposien über Sprachkontakte in Europa, 5. Linguistische Arbeiten, 125 (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1982), 227–35; Gearóid Mac Eoin, "Literacy and Cultural Change in Ireland," *Verschriftung und Verschriftlichung: Aspekte des Medienwechsels in verschiedenen Kulturen und Epochen*, ed. Christine Ehler and Ursula Schaefer. ScriptOralia, 94 (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1998), 99–131.

³ See Etienne Rynne, "The Lugaedon Pillar Stone," *Journal of the Galway Archaeological and Historical Society* 47 (1995): 205–11.

the external Biblically-influenced literary tradition which the Christian newcomers brought with them.⁴

This new literature was composed and transmitted in the monasteries of Early Christian Ireland and is marked out from other European literatures by a number of characteristics—foremost of which is its great antiquity and the fact that it was written not in Latin—the *lingua franca* of medieval Europe—but in the indigenous vernacular of Ireland. This medieval literature forms the most extensive and venerable extant corpus of vernacular literature north of the Alps, and is conventionally divided into the following periods: Archaic Old Irish: 600–700; Old Irish: 700–900; and Middle Irish: 900–1200. We also conventionally speak of the Early Modern Irish period, from 1200–1650, and of course the Late Modern Irish period which begins in the middle of the seventeenth century and continues to the present day.⁵

The society reflected in much of the early literature is one in which hospitality and honor were mutually dependent concepts. Such concepts were enforced, for example, through social and legal control of the poetic orders (whose satires, in turn, ensured conformity to expected norms).⁶ An Old Irish law tract of the eighth century, for example, mentions as one of the roles of the poets the enforcement of the regulation of honor: “It é ind fhilid do-bongat cáin n-enech dáig na crích n-imderg imná bí giall ná comurradas coro fhuiglea cách día giall grúaide frisna fileda ar omun a n-aíre” (It is the poets who enforce the regulation of honor, because [of the existence of] the hostile territories without exchange of hostages and joint citizenship [lit. ‘around which there is neither hostage nor joint citizenship’]), so that everyone submits to the poets for fear of their satire, having their cheeks/face/honour as hostage [lit. ‘by means of the hostage of his cheek’].”⁷

⁴ Two main schools of interpretation have grown up, the first often called ‘nativist’ and the other termed ‘Latinist.’ For a discussion of how best to interpret the earlier literature, see chapter one of Kim McCone’s *Pagan Past and Christian Present in Early Irish Literature* (Maynooth: An Sagart, 1990), as well as the reviews thereof by John Carey in *Speculum* 67 (1992): 450–52, and Patrick Sims-Williams in *Éigse* 29 (1996): 179–96.

⁵ For a discussion of Late Modern Irish, see Feargal Ó Béarra, “Late Modern Irish and the Dynamics of Language Change and Language Death,” *The Celtic Languages in Contact: Papers from the Workshop Within the Framework of the XIII International Congress of Celtic Studies, Bonn, 26 – 27 July 2007*, ed. Hildegard L. C. Tristram (Potsdam: Potsdam University Press, 2007), 260–69.

⁶ For the latest and by far the most comprehensive survey of satire in early Ireland, see Roisin McLaughlin, *Early Irish Satire* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 2008).

⁷ Liam Breatnach, “On Satire and the Poet’s Circuit,” *Unity in Diversity. Studies in Irish and Scottish Gaelic Language, Literature and History*, ed. Cathal G. Ó Háinle and Donald Meek. Léann na Tríonóide, 1 (Dublin: School of Irish, Trinity College, 2004), 25–35; here 26–27.

While the literary manifestation of satire in Ireland is overwhelmingly in poetry, a small number of prose satires survive. Foremost of these is *Tromdhámh Guaire*, the oldest manuscript witness of which is the fifteenth-century *Leabhar Mhic Cárthaigh Riabhaigh*, or *The Book of Lismore*, as it is known in English.⁸ The title of the tale might best be translated as “the excessive poetic retinue which afflicted Guaire.” It purports to tell of events which took place in seventh century Ireland, and relates the lengths to which king Guaire the Generous must go to avoid being satirized by his own court-poet, Seanchán, whose preposterous demands of hospitality leave the king in despair. Composed no earlier than ca. 1300,⁹ probably west of the river Shannon (as the great monasteries of eastern and central Ireland were no more), *Tromdhámh Guaire* is of no small import as it offers us a glimpse into the mind of an author who felt compelled to produce a canny and highly humorous lampoon on the perceived excesses of the newly-organized Bardic Order of post-twelfth-century Ireland.¹⁰

The text, which has been edited twice¹¹, has been described as “one long riotous attack on the poets and their ways”¹² and, as a text “which gives the poets their well-deserved come-uppance.”¹³ Its second editor, Maud Joynt, wrote that: “The story gives a humorously exaggerated account of the enormous power wielded directly and indirectly by the *filidh* of mediaeval Ireland, who formed a

⁸ For *Leabhar Mhic Cárthaigh Riabhaigh*, see Robert Alexander Stewart Macalister, *The Book of Lismore. Facsimile with introduction* (Dublin: Irish Manuscripts Commission, 1950); Brian Ó Cuív, “Observations on the Book of Lismore,” *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 83C (1983): 269–92.

⁹ This dating is based on the evidence of a number of Norman-French and English loanwords in the text as well as certain morphological and syntactic aspects of the author’s language.

¹⁰ Although the text, as we have it today, dates from the Early Modern Irish period, this is not to imply that the materials it contains are necessarily as young. That certain elements of the narrative are older than the time the text was written is shown, for example, by the reference to one episode which is found in the material inserted by Interpolator H in the early twelfth-century manuscript *Lebor na hUidre viz. in Cath Cairnd Chonaill*, an early tenth-century text featuring Guaire, where we read of the tradition that Guaire (through Marbhán) was able to procure a cow whose liver was of grease, as well as blackberries at the end of Winter: *Bá maith iarom inti Guaire. Is dó doratad tria rath féli in bó co n-aib ítha & inna sméra sind fulliuch* (Best and Bergin: Royal Irish Academy, 1929), ll. 9724–25. This would seem to be an allusion to two incidents preserved in *Tromdhámh Guaire* at ll. 465 ff., and 525 ff. of Joynt’s edition, *Tromdámh Guaire* (Dublin: The Stationery Office, 1931). See also James Carney, *Studies in Irish Literature and History* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1955), 169.

¹¹ See Owen Connellan, *Imtheacht na Tromdhaimhe; or, The Proceedings of the Great Bardic Institution*. Transactions of the Ossianic Society, 5 (Dublin: O’Grady, 1860); Maud Joynt, *Tromdámh Guaire* (Dublin: The Stationery Office, 1931).

¹² Robin Flower, *The Irish Tradition* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1947), 75.

¹³ Vivian Mercier, *The Irish Comic Tradition* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1962), 119.

corporation with rules and privileges of its own which were recognised in the Brehon Law.”¹⁴

The narrative begins with the appointment of the poet Seanchán as successor to Dallán Forgaill, chief-poet of Ireland, who died having unjustly satirized the king of the kingdom of Airghialla, Aodh mac Duach Dhuibh. Seanchán decides to pay his first official visit to king Guaire of the province of Connachta (in the west of Ireland), he who had never been satirized due to lack of generosity (as the text states), saying “Gidh maith eineach Guaire, ní bhéar-sa a bhfuil annso chuige do lot Connacht, ár ní beag liom a dhá dtrian do bhreith chuige agus trian d’fhágbháil. Agus do roine samhlaidh; ní rug go Guaire acht trí caegaid éigeas agus trí caegaid éigsín agus trí caegaid con agus trí caegaid giolla agus trí caegaid ban muintire agus trí nónbhur d’áes gacha ceirde,”¹⁵ i.e., “Though great be Guaire’s generosity, I will not bring my full retinue with me lest I ruin Connachta, but it would not be excessive if I were only to bring two thirds of my retinue, i.e., 150 poets, 150 student poets, 150 dogs, 150 servants, 150 of the womenfolk, and 27 of each of the artisans.”

No sooner at the residence of Guaire than do the poets begin to grumble, so that their womenfolk, and then Seanchán himself, make a series of four unreasonable and seemingly unprocurable demands of the king. This leaves Guaire in a dilemma for he has no choice but to provide them with what they demand, but is helpless as that which they demand cannot—on the face of it—be procured.

These demands, such as blackberries in late February, a pet cuckoo at Christmas, the meat of a pure-white, red-eared liverless cow, bacon from a pig that has yet to be born, the beer produced from a single grain, all belong to the store of European medieval riddles, the international *Lügenmärchen* and the motif of the Impossible or Absurd Task.¹⁶

Guaire, facing potential satire by the poets at his seeming lack of generosity, is saved by his uterine brother, the hermitic liminal figure Marbhán, who manages to satisfy the unreasonable demands of the poets, thus saving the king’s honor. Moreover, Marbhán manages to outwit the poets at their own craft and show them up as being ignorant of their own trade. In deciding to teach the poets a lesson, he places a magical injunction or *geis* on them that they may not spend two consecutive nights under the same roof until they have found *Táin Bó Cúailnge* (the most important epic of the Irish Middle Ages), which they had been unable to

¹⁴ Joynt, *Tromdámh Guaire*, ix.

¹⁵ Text normalized after Joynt, *Tromdámh Guaire*, ll. 279–85.

¹⁶ See Tom Peete Cross, *Motif-Index of Early Irish Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Publications, 1953), H.1010 ff.

recite when asked to do so by Marbhán.¹⁷ They search both Ireland and Scotland in vain. It is only through the intercession of St Caillín and the saints of Ireland that the poets manage to find the *Táin*. Thankful for finding the *Táin*, and having seen the error of their ways, the poets agree never again to be a burden on society.

The text, which runs to some 11,300 words (or 1315 lines in Joynt's edition), may be divided into seven main sections, reflecting some of the main strands of tradition employed by the redactor in composing his tale. These are:

1. The preamble dealing with the death of Dallán Forgaill, chief-poet of Ireland, and the appointment of Seanchán as his successor [Joynt, *Tromdámh Guaire*, ll. 1–251], ca. 20%.
2. The visit of Seanchán and his burdensome retinue to the court of Guaire and the excessive demands made by them on his generosity [Joynt, *Tromdámh Guaire*, ll. 251–629], ca. 28%.
3. Seanchán's satire on the mice and cats, and his journey on the back of Iorasán, leader of the cats, to the monastery of Cluain Mhic Nóis, on the eastern side of the river Shannon [Joynt, *Tromdámh Guaire*, ll. 630–800], ca. 14%.
4. The avenging by the hermit Marbhán of his pet white boar, sacrificed to appease the preposterous demands of the poets; his victorious verbal duels with the poets of Ireland, and his demand that they find for him *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, which they were unable to recite for him when asked [Joynt, *Tromdámh Guaire*, ll. 801–1026], ca. 17%.
5. The journey of Seanchán and his poetic retinue to Scotland *via* the Isle of Man in search of *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, and the verse capping competition¹⁸ between St Caillín (in the guise of a leper) with the *cailleach* or croon of Man [Joynt, *Tromdámh Guaire*, ll. 1027–233], ca. 15%.
6. Their return to Ireland *via* Áth Cliath, and the eventual recording of the *Táin* in *Lebor na hUidre*, through the intercession of St Caillín, from the oral recitation of the Ulster Cycle hero Fearghas mac Róich who arises from the dead to narrate the tale [Joynt, *Tromdámh Guaire*, ll. 1234–90], ca. 4%.
7. The promise made by the poets of Ireland to cease their burdensome ramblings throughout Ireland [Joynt, *Tromdámh Guaire*, ll. 1290–315], ca. 2%.

¹⁷ For *Táin Bó Cúailnge* see *Aspects of the Táin*, ed. James Patrick Mallory (Belfast: December Publications, 1992); *Ulidia. Proceedings of the First International Conference on the Ulster Cycle of Tales, Belfast and Emain Macha, 8–12 April 1994*, ed. James Patrick Mallory and Gerard Stockman (Belfast: December Publications, 1994); *Studien zur Táin Bó Cuailnge*, ed. Hildegard L. C. Tristram (Tübingen: Günter Narr, 1993); *Ulidia 2: Proceedings of the Second International Conference on the Ulster Cycle*, ed. Ruairí Ó hUiginn and Brian Ó Catháin (An Sagart: Maynooth, 2009).

¹⁸ See Máirín Ní Dhonnchadha, "The Prull narrative in Sanas Cormaic," *Cim Chille Cúile: Texts, Saints and Places: Essays in Honour of Pádraig Ó Riain*, ed. John Carey, Máire Herbert, and Kevin Murray (Aberystwyth: Celtic Studies Publications, 2004), 163–77.

By drawing together a number of strands of tradition pertaining to both Guaire and Seanchán, and by the addition of much original material from his own pen, the author manages to position his text within the pre-existing narrative templates and pseudo-historical literary traditions of Ireland with which his audience must have been familiar if they were to fully appreciate the biting sarcasm and satire contained in the narrative.

Medieval Irish prose is, with few exceptions, an anonymous tradition; that is to say that the name of the author does not form part of the textual integrity of a given piece. Thus, we are faced with the challenge of trying to imagine who might have been responsible for the composition of our text and identifying the circumstances which might have compelled them to do so. A closer look at certain aspects of the text might help us gain an insight into the author's aims and circumstances.

The name that the author chose for his text is perhaps no coincidence. It is best translated as "the burdensome or excessive poetic retinue which afflicted/tormented/oppressed Guaire." It consists of the adjective *trom* "heavy, burdensome, excessive" and the noun *dámh*. The word *dámh* means "a company, legitimate number of guests, party, following, retinue" which leads to the second meaning of "a bardic company, poets."¹⁹ The compositum *tromdhámh* is rendered by the *Dictionary of the Irish Language* as "large, oppressive company or band of visitors [. . .] more partic[ularly] of a bardic company, band of poets."²⁰

It is tempting to think that the choice of the word *tromdhámh* for the title of the tale is not random but appears to draw on a knowledge of a legal stipulation regarding the legitimate number of a chief-poet's retinue.²¹ The legal text in question clearly states that this should consist of "Cethrar ar fhichit do ollamain for túathaib, da fher deac oc acru, dechenbor dó for féile fledaib, ochtar for coi la rí," i.e., "Twenty four people for an *ollamh* when engaged on public business,

¹⁹ See *Dictionary of the Irish Language, Based Mainly on Old and Middle Irish Materials*, ed. Ernest Gordon Quin (general editor) (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 1990), *sv* *dám*. Now online at www.dil.ie (last accessed on Jan. 30, 2010).

²⁰ See *Dictionary of the Irish Language* *sv* *tromdám*.

²¹ It might be asked to what extent could the author have been consciously aware of or familiar with the existence of such legal stipulations when redacting his text or whether such information was no more than the stock of common knowledge among the learned of the period. In this regard, Katherine Simms has noted that "Many of the most eminent judges of Brehon Law in medieval and early modern Ireland were proficient poets also, and the poetic art was studied in their schools." (Katherine Simms, "The Poetic Lawyers of Early Sixteenth-Century Ireland," *Ériu* 57 [2007]: 121–32; here 121). Therefore, it would appear that knowledge of Irish law would have been within the remit of the poet's education.

twelve when pursuing a claim, ten at feasts of hospitality, eight when on a circuit with a king."²²

An understanding of the upheavals of the twelfth century in Ireland may be instructive in gaining an appreciation of the author's motivation. This period marked a social, ecclesiastic, political, linguistic, cultural, and literary watershed in Ireland so that by the close of that century, the island was to be greatly and irreversibly transformed, aided in no small measure by the disruption caused by the arrival of the Anglo-Normans in the dying years of the century.²³

By the middle of the thirteenth century, the composition, preservation and transmission of literature was well on its way to passing out of the hands of the monastic establishments of central and eastern Ireland and into those of the native learned secular families west of the river Shannon.²⁴ Whereas under the pre-1200 monastic regime, it had been the *lector* who had been ultimately responsible for all matters literary and historical, now it was the charge of the *ollamh* (chief-poet) or *seanchaidh* (custodian of inherited family related lore, 'clan' historian if you like) of the secular learned families of Ireland. Naturally enough, this new scenario led to novel and unexpected possibilities in the types of text which could be written and transmitted. It would appear from the wider range of materials composed after 1200 that the new secular scholars enjoyed or perhaps exercised more freedom in choosing materials of more direct interest to their patrons and political leaders than had previously been the case under the monastic system.

One of the new and exciting possibilities which arose after the move from the monasteries would appear to have been the opportunity afforded to (or simply availed of by) the poetic classes to re-organize the literary language of poetry into a new prescriptive, conservative standard.²⁵ Whether this opportunity arose directly because of the decline of the monasteries under the twelfth-century reform or was aided by the arrival of the Anglo-Normans, or whether indeed it would have come to pass regardless of those events is a moot point.

This new literary standard language, which was to be exclusively used for the composition of what is termed Bardic Poetry, is usually referred to as Classical

²² See *Uraicecht na Riar: The Poetic Grades in Early Irish Law*, ed. Liam Breatnach (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1987), § 5.

²³ See Brian Ó Cuív, "Ireland in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries: c. 1000–1169," *The Course of Irish History*, ed. Theodore William Moody and Francis Xavier Martin (Cork: Mercier Press, 2001), 81–94.

²⁴ See Proinsias Mac Cana, "The Rise of the Later Schools of *Filidheacht*," *Ériu* 25 (1974): 126–46.

²⁵ See Brian Ó Cuív, "The Linguistic Training of the Medieval Irish Poet," *Celtica* 10 (1973): 114–40; Damian McManus, "Classical Modern Irish," *Progress in Medieval Irish Studies*, ed. Kim McCone and Katharine Simms (Maynooth: Department of Old Irish, St. Patrick's College, 1996), 164–87.

Early Modern Irish or *Gaeilge na Scol*, i.e., ‘the Irish of the [Bardic] Schools,’ and is found in the vast majority of poems produced in the period 1200–1650. This corpus, generally referred to as Bardic Poetry or in Irish as *Filíocht na Scol*, i.e., ‘the Poetry of the [Bardic] Schools,’ composed by professional poets, was used in the public performance of poems in front of patron, family, extended family and clients alike. This surviving poetic corpus consists for the most part of eulogy and elegy, but also includes satires, religious poems, and love poems. Nearly 2,000 poems survive.²⁶

Evidence for the standardization of the language is two-fold. First of all, there is the empirical evidence of the poems written between 1200–1650 which rigidly adhere to the same literary standard with only the slightest of deviation in that period. Secondly, there is the evidence of the so-called Irish Grammatical Tracts—the text-books used by the *ollamh* in the Bardic Schools.²⁷ In these are set out, in painstaking detail, the rules of this new standard aided by countless examples of three registers of language termed *canamhain* ‘that which people actually say,’ *lochtach* ‘faulty usage’ and *cóir* ‘that which is correct.’ This division of the contemporary literary and spoken language shows a remarkable level of understanding of the pragmatics and difficulties of language and language use.

However, in addition to standardizing the language, is it not unlikely that the poets also re-organized the rights and privileges to which they were entitled by virtue of their profession? Might it not be improbable that they also attempted to formalize and regularize certain arrangements regarding matters such as the payment due for the various types of poem, etc? Notwithstanding the fact that there is no documentary evidence to show that any type of poetic convention, where such matters might have been regularized, ever took place, the very fact that the poetic order and its new standardized language and versification enjoyed a continued existence over a period of nearly five hundred years must surely speak for a well-structured and highly-organized bedrock of regulations on which the Bardic Order—termed “the earliest trade union in Europe” by Carney²⁸—might or must have been established?

²⁶ See the data base at <http://bardic.celt.dias.ie/main.html> (last accessed on Jan. 30, 2010). See also *Irish Bardic Poetry*, ed. Osborn Bergin, David Greene, and Fergus Kelly (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1970); Katharine Simms, “Literacy and the Irish Bards,” *Literacy in Medieval Celtic Societies*, ed. Huw Pryce (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 238–58; Pádraig A. Breatnach, “The Chief’s Poet,” *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, C 83 (1983): 37–79; James Carney, “Society and the Bardic Poet,” *Studies: an Irish Quarterly Review* 62 (1973): 233–250.

²⁷ See *Bardic Syntactical Tracts*, ed. Lambert McKenna, 1944; Osborn Bergin, “The Native Irish Grammarian,” *Proceedings of the British Academy* 24 (1939): 205–35.

²⁸ James Carney, *The Irish Bardic Poet: a Study in the Relationship of Poet and Patron* (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1967), 6.

A further point central to an understanding of the author's motivation is suggested by the emphasis in the text on hospitality and the dread of satire due to a perceived lack of generosity. A brief survey of Irish literature indicates that one of the most frequent grounds for satire — if not indeed *the* most frequent — was lack of generosity or hospitality. According to the native literary tradition, the cause of the first satire which was composed in Ireland was inhospitality.²⁹ We also find the refusal of hospitality (i.e., the refusal of food or shelter where it is legally due) dealt with in the legal texts, where it is termed *esáin* or *eteach*.

Although there were certain limitations to the obligation to provide hospitality, and certain members of society (criminals, for example) were exempted under certain circumstances, the refusal of hospitality to those who were legally entitled to it held legal as well as social consequences.³⁰

Moreover, one law text³¹ treats refusal of hospitality on the same level as satire while another³² stipulates that the fort from which a person is sent away, due to their having been refused hospitality, immediately loses its *díre* or "the payment made in the event of its destruction."³³ Such a fort is treated as if it were a fort in which fratricide had been committed.³⁴

Cloer to the time *Tromdhámh Guaire* was composed, Giolla Brighde mac Con Midhe, who died in the last quarter of the thirteenth century,³⁵ viewed the concept of hospitality with a near religious aura. He says:

Doicheall do dhéanamh re haoighidh
Anaircheas mór — mairg nach tuig;
Re coinnimh nochá cóir doilghe:
Roinnidh dóibh an Coimdhe a chuid.

[To be niggardly with a guest is a great impropriety — woe to him who does not understand — it is not right to be mean with visiting companies; the Lord shares his portion with them.]³⁶

²⁹ See Elizabeth Gray, *Cath Maige Tuired: The Second Battle of Mag Tuired*, (Dublin: Irish Texts Society: 1982), 34 § 39.

³⁰ Fergus Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1988), 140.

³¹ See the text beginning *Cair cis lir dos-liad lánlóg enech lá Féine?* in *Corpus Iuris Hibernici: ad fidem codicum manuscriptorum recognovit D. A. Binchy*, ed. Daniel Anthony Binchy (Baile Átha Cliath: Institiúid Ard-Léinn Bhaile Átha Cliath, 1978), at 1123.22.

³² See Binchy, *Corpus Iuris Hibernici*, at 14.1 ff.

³³ Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law*, 139.

³⁴ See further Daniel Binchy, *Críth Gablach* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1941), 81 *sv cóe*.

³⁵ See Nicholas Jonathon Williams, *The Poems of Giolla Brighde Mac Con Midhe* (Dublin: Irish Texts Society, 1980), 4.

³⁶ Williams, *The Poems of Giolla Brighde Mac Con Midhe*, 242–43.

Such a preoccupation with *oineach*—the term used to describe *both* honor and generosity, is indicative of what Robert C. Elliott called a “shame” culture, that is, “a culture in which man literally lives by his good name. If his name is enhanced, he flourishes; if it is defiled, he dies. In such a culture the poets are truly creative. By their encomium they create honor; they make good names. But they are also truly destructive, for their satire eats away honor, which is to say, it destroys life itself.”³⁷

Thus by virtue of this fear of satire, the poet could be assured a high status in society. Fergus Kelly notes that the poet’s high status in early Irish law “reflects early Irish society’s deep preoccupation with honour (*enech* lit. ‘face’): it is damaged through satire and increased through praise.” “The same characteristic,” he continues “was noted in the 16th century by the English chronicler [Richard] Stanihurst who describes the Irish as ‘greedie of praise and fearful of dishonour.’”³⁸

This fear of satire was backed up by a belief that satire could cause actual physical blemish or injury. Reference is found in the works of the English poets Ben Johnson and William Shakespeare to the rhyming to death of rats by Irish poets.³⁹ There are also at least three documented cases of human death, ostensibly caused by the satire of a poet to be found in Irish sources. To mention but one of these, the Annals of Connacht *sub anno* 1414, record the death of John Stanley, the English Lord Lieutenant in Ireland, who died within five weeks of being satirized by a poet of the famous Ó hUiginn family. I give the passage in full:

Seon Stanlae .i. fer inait Rig Saxan do techt a nErinn in hoc anno do milled Gaidel na hErenn in hoc anno .i. fer nach tuc termann do chill na do thuaith na do aes dana na hErenn .i. cach aen fora rucc se da clerchaib & da n-aes eladan in cach cerd do arcain do & a cur re fuacht & re faigdi do. Et Niall mac Aeda h. Uiginn do arcain do a nUisnech Mide. Et Hanri Dalutun do dol fo mac Semais Diuit & fo muintir an Rig & bo sa mboin & capall san capall & caera san cairig & mucc san muicc do tabairt do do Muintir Uiccind & a n-idnagal a Condachtaib iar sin. Et Seon Stanlai do aerad la Muintir Uicind iar sin. Et ni raibi Seon Stanlai beo acht v. sechdmaine nama in tan fuair bas do nem na n-aer-sin; & is e sin an dara firt filed doronad ar Niall h. nUiginn .i.

³⁷ Robert C. Elliott, *The Power of Satire: Magic, Ritual, Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960), 30–31.

³⁸ Mentioned by Fergus Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1988), 43.

³⁹ See Fred Norris Robinson, “Satirists and Enchanters in Early Irish Literature,” *Studies in the History of Religions Presented to Crawford Howell Toy* (New York: Macmillan, 1912), 95–130.

Clann Connmaig do lethad aidchi creiche Neill a Cladaind & Seon Stanlai do marbad do nem na n-aer.⁴⁰

[John Stanley, lieutenant of the King of England, came to Ireland this year to destroy the Gaels of Ireland. He was a man who granted no protection to cleric or laymen or to the poets of Ireland, for he plundered every one of its clerics and men of skill in every art on whom he laid hands and exposed them to cold and beggary. He plundered Niall son of Aed O hUicinn in Usnagh of Meath, and Henry Dalton attacked the son of James Diuit and the King's followers and [took from them] a cow for each cow and a horse for each horse and a sheep for each sheep and a pig for each pig [which Niall had lost] and gave them to the Ui hUicinn. They were then convoyed into Connacht. After this the Ui Uicinn made lampoons on John Stanley and he lived only five weeks till he died from the venom of the lampoons. Now this is one of two poet's (sic) miracles which were worked for Niall O hUicinn: the freezing to death of the Clanconway on the night after he was plundered in Clada, and the death of John Stanley from the venom of the lampoons.]

Suffice to say then that such was the fear of satire, and the importance of *oineach* (i.e., honor and generosity) that the mere threat of satire must have been enough to secure the cooperation of any potential victim.

Remembering then the close association between honor and generosity, the use of the word *oineach* (*enech*) to describe both, and the apparent fear of satire alluded to above, it is no accident that the author chose as the victim for his attack on the poetic order the figure of Guaire with his highly appropriate epithet *Guaire an Oinigh* or Guaire the Generous. The role of Guaire is that of the perfect patron, an ostensibly powerful king whose reputation for bounty precedes him. He is generous and patient to a fault and becomes the potential victim of satire at the hands of his own court-poet Seanchán. The use of Guaire in the text served to aid the author in augmenting his audience's perception of the severely unjust nature of the poets' behaviour within — and most likely without — the tale. Thus, we might speculate that the author was someone who was familiar not only with the power and fear of satire but also with the abuse of satire by the poets.

A number of episodes in the text, which amount to nothing short of direct attacks on the poets and their ways, seem to suggest a touch of resentment on the part of the author, caused perhaps by the newly-found status and privileges (and abuse thereof) of the poets. As these episodes do not appear elsewhere in the *Guaire dossier*, they may very well stem directly from the author himself, and it might be argued that they be viewed as a literary reflex of his resentment.

⁴⁰ See *Annals of Connaught*, ed. A. Martin Freeman (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1944), *sub anno* 1414.

The inability of Seanchán or indeed of any of his poets to recite for Marbhán the story of *Táin Bó Cúailnge*—the most important epic of the Irish Middle Ages—is a clear attempt by the author to insinuate that Seanchán is unworthy of his status as *ollamh*. This position appears to draw on a very well-known quasi-legal stipulation regarding the knowledge and education which must be acquired by one who wishes to claim the status of *ollamh*. In *Uraicecht na Ríar* (“The Primer of Poetic Grades”), a legal text dealing with the privileges and grades of poets, dated to the second half of the eighth century,⁴¹ it is stipulated that an *ollamh* (chief-poet) must be familiar with three hundred and fifty compositions i.e. “secht cócait drécht lais.”⁴² These words are glossed in one copy of the text by the words “.i. coig caega da primhsgelaibh 7 da caega d’fhosgelaibh” (two hundred and fifty principal tales, and one hundred minor tales). Among these so-called principal tales, as we know from the Tale Lists⁴³ and other sources, was the famous *Táin Bó Cúailnge*.

Another scene which mocks the conventions of the poetic order is that where Marbhán gains admittance to the hostel in which the poets are feasting, by sarcastically stating “Atá mo charadradh féin re héigse [. . .] i. seanmháthair mhná mo ghiolla iarmua fhileadh isidhe”⁴⁴ (I myself am a friend of poetry for my servant’s wife’s grandmother was/is the great-grandchild of a poet). Marbhán’s claim of indirect hereditary descent from a poet (via his servant) would seem to be poking fun at another legal stipulation which states that for a man to become a poet he must come of a family of poets: “Ceist, cuin as cland fhiled in chland? Ní hansae, fili a n-athair 7 a senathair. Ceist, cuin do-báiter isin chland ind fhiledacht? Ní hansae, mani bet a trí diib, it baird iarum”⁴⁵ (When is the family a family of poets? Not difficult; their father is a poet and their grandfather. When is the status of poet extinguished in the family? Not difficult; if there be not three [viz. generations] of them, they are then bards).

Further scenes, which must have provided great mirth for the audience, include the ones where Marbhán shows the poets to be totally ignorant of the origins of their own professed vocation, and the timpanists to be ignorant of the origin of the instrument of which they claim mastery. The presence of such scenes may infer the poets’ ignorance of etymology, a branch of learning which was a central part of a poet’s education. Many other scenes provide endless humor at the expense of the poets such as the one where Marbhán informs Oirgne Aitheamhuin, chief-poet of

⁴¹ See *Uraicecht na Riar: The Poetic Grades in Early Irish Law*, ed. Liam Breatnach (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1987), 77.

⁴² See *Uraicecht na Riar: The Poetic Grades in Early Irish Law*, § 1.

⁴³ See Proinsias Mac Cana, *The Learned Tales of Medieval Ireland* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1980).

⁴⁴ Normalized after Joynt, *Tromdámh Guaire*, ll. 823–25.

⁴⁵ Breatnach, *Uraicecht na Riar* § 7.

Tuadhmhumhain, that although there are many ignorant men in the hostel there is none as ignorant as he for two men whom he does not know are sharing his wife without his knowledge, i.e., “‘Is dóigh liomsa,’ ar Marbhán, ‘gidh iomdha duine ainbhfeasach i tigh na tromdháimhe, nach bhfuil dhíbh uile aon duine is ainbhfeasaighe ioná thusa’”⁴⁶ (“It seems to me,” said Marbhán, “that although there are many ignorant people in the hostel, there is not one of them more ignorant than yourself”).⁴⁷

Needless to say, such scenes as those described above only added to the undercurrent of resentment which pervades the text and to the audience’s outrage at the poets’ ignorance. The text appears to be representative of someone who resented the new-found success, social standing (and prosperity) of the newly re-organized Bardic order. The author resents the abuse of hospitality by the poets. He also resents their abuse of satire by having Seanchán, in one episode, stoop so low as to satirize the mice—over the loss of an egg—and to satirize the cats—for not having kept the mice in check!⁴⁸ There is resentment of the insatiable appetite of the poets for luxury and of the lavish lifestyle of their wives and retinue. Through numerous wordplays, the author ridicules the language of the poets. He parodies their fumbling with words, and casts aspersions on their use of language, especially in the line “Is maith an dúan cibé do thuigfeadh hi” (It’s a great poem for those who could understand it) and “Is cubhas dúinne [. . .] nach feadamairne an fearr nó an measa sin ioná an chéad-duan do rinnis” (We declare that we cannot say whether that poem is better or worse than the first poem you composed).⁴⁹

The actions of both Marbhán and St Caillín in the narrative serve to deliver the message that it is the Church which should be entrusted with the preservation and transmission of literature as it is the Church which saved the day by not only finding the *Táin* again but by preserving it for future generations by committing it to writing in the famous manuscript *Lebor na hUidre*,⁵⁰ the oldest surviving medieval manuscript containing Irish narrative materials.⁵¹

⁴⁶ Normalized after Joynt, *Tromdhámh Guaire*, ll. 907–10.

⁴⁷ This latter scene finds an earlier reflex in the Old Irish Triads, dated to the second half of the ninth century (see Kuno Meyer, *The Triads of Ireland* [Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 1906], xi), one of which states *Trí gena ata messu brón: gen snechta oc legad, gen do mná frit iar mbith fhir aili lé, gen chon fhoilmnigh*, i.e., “[the] three smiles that are worse than sorrow [are] the smile of the snow as it melts, the smile of your wife on you after another man has been with her, the grin of a hound ready to leap at you,” Kuno Meyer, *Triads of Ireland*, no. 91.

⁴⁸ Joynt, *Tromdhámh Guaire*, ll. 699 ff.

⁴⁹ Normalized after Joynt, *Tromdhámh Guaire*, ll. 70–01 and 145–46 respectively.

⁵⁰ Joynt, *Tromdhámh Guaire*, ll. 1282–84.

⁵¹ See *Lebor na hUidre: Book of the Dun Cow*, ed. Richard Irvine Best and Osborn Bergin (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 1929).

By having both Marbhán and Caillín save the day, and by ridiculing the poets, the author may be offering the following subtext: look at what happens when you hand over the responsibility for literature and learning to the secular classes—as represented by the poets—they cannot even preserve the most famous epic of the whole literary tradition, the epic which we, the clerics, originally composed. If that wasn't bad enough, although these people cannot shoulder their professional responsibilities, they have no difficulty in exploiting their status within society by their unreasonable demands, by their blatant abuse of hospitality and by their misuse of satire.

Several commentators have suggested that the author might have been a cleric.⁵² I would suggest that there may have been resentment on the part of some clergy at the fact that the poets (under the aegis of the secular literary families) were now the guardians of the written word. By standardising the literary language, the poets had virtually gained control of the official language of professional poetry for the next 450 years. The intellectual and socially strategic *coup* that the poets had pulled off would have evoked a strong reaction, no doubt, from the former custodians of literature and history, many of whom now found themselves receiving the short end of the stick. The attitude displayed by the author is consistent, to my mind, with the mentality of an author who has an axe to grind, and who found himself—due to the changing times—no longer in the loop.

I should stress that my remarks are of a very preliminary nature as I believe that a closer analysis of the language of the text may hold the key to the identity of the author, who might also have been a literate person of lower educational, professional, and social standing than the professional poets themselves. Alternatively, the author may have been someone who begrudged the professional poets their new found luck, and who would have gladly documented their excesses and abuses, someone of the descendants of former clerics who had not successfully negotiated the changeover following the upheavals of the twelfth century, and had not secured a place in the new system which was dominated by the secular learned families. Another possibility still is that the author might have been a former poet, who having found a late vocation, entered a religious institution. This suggestion is tempting as it would surely be the ultimate irony, for who better to satirize the satirists than one of their own number?

Whatever its provenance, *Tromdhámh Guaire* is “completely untypical of medieval Irish literature in general in the attitudes it adopts towards earlier tradition”⁵³ and

⁵² The idea that the text might have been composed by a disgruntled poet (or bard) is another avenue of investigation which deserves consideration.

⁵³ Seán Ó Coileáin, “The Making of *Tromdhámh Guaire*,” *Ériu* 28 (1977): 32–70; here 66.

is a text which represents, in the words of Seán Ó Coileáin, “a deliberate and somewhat irreverent use of earlier tradition by the author who was no longer subject to its dictates.”⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Seán Ó Coileáin, “The Making of *Tromdhámh Guaire*,” 32.

Chapter 13

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Humorous Transgression in the Non-Conformist *fabliaux* Genre: A Bakhtinian Analysis of Three Comic Tales

The Old French *fabliaux* insist on and delight in humorous transgression of every conceivable type, based on the Bakhtinian principles of comic inversion, irony and surprise. They often generate an explosion of laughter. The structural and ideological feature of humor demarcates them from other medieval genres, even comedy itself, since its foundation is based on topsy-turvy transposition, unexpected reversal, and illogical situations. Simon Gaunt finds the principal preoccupation of the genre to be “an impulse to overturn perceived hierarchical structures of all kinds, to reveal them as artificial and susceptible to manipulation Hierarchies, in the *fabliaux* are shown to be constructs to derive from convention, not nature.”¹ Such overturned conventional structures produce laughter, even in the face of horror, violence, or disaster, often because the socially superior character is seen bested. Charmaine Lee interestingly argues that the texts are a manifestation of carnival.² Holly A. Crocker suggests that “The *fabliaux* are radically transactional in their ability to fragment the generic boundaries that provide recognizable shape to other poetic bodies. Unstable in terms of authorship, audience, purpose, and even effect, the *fabliaux* are almost impossible

¹ Simon Gaunt, *Gender and Genre in Medieval French Literature*. Cambridge Studies in French, 53 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 235, 236.

² Charmaine Lee, “I *Fabliaux* e le Convenzione della Parodia,” *Prospettive sui Fabliaux: Contesto, Sistema, Realizzazione*, ed. Alberto Limentani. Ydioma Tripharium, 3 (Padua: Liviana, 1976), 3–41, esp. 30–41.

to see as a coherent creative corpus."³ While indeed unstable in their role-shifting and social class-inversion, many of these *fabliaux* can in fact be seen within a coherent framework precisely because of that consistent instability, in their Rabelaisian joyful inversion of the norm, in their Bakhtinian premise of social reversal.

Kyryl Petkov points out the historic reason for such social upheavals behind those of the *fabliaux*, noting:

During the period between 1050 and 1250, western Europe was in the grips of dynamism on an unprecedented scale . . . The key word was *change*. Nothing was stable, opportunities abounded for those willing to seize them, and the Western world was wide open to a reconceptualization of the major social values. A new ethos emerged, predicated on the structural reorganization of economy and society that made the distribution of wealth less dependent on the distribution of power . . . The self-assertive drive of the epoch is beautifully captured in their terse, down to earth, and action-filled verse. The *fabliaux* are populated with prosperous peasants marrying into the nobility, independent wives, indulging clerics, hard-working bourgeois busy at amassing riches, and knights trading their arms for wit and shrewdness.⁴

Social roles are hence in transition, and in fact often reversed, albeit temporarily, in a Mardi Gras profusion of rebellion and acquisition of power previously denied. What is the nature of that transgression? Petrov contends that

all the interest in mobility notwithstanding, the *fabliaux* are on a quest to define a social order that would substitute for the destabilized estate society. The *fabliaux* ethos is the idealized version of an encompassing system, more comprehensive than the existing estate order and resting on a principally different value register. The *fabliaux* yardstick is a world 'that never was,' but one that is rapidly taking shape.⁵

Indeed, the replacement of one constraining system, at least for the lower classes, with another which posits a wholly other register of victors achieving new social and economic success, is the *modus operandi* of the genre—the way it endorses change. Perhaps that *fabliau* yardstick is a world that never was, but that world haunted the imaginations of the lower classes who envisioned a potential social hierarchy in new and more equitable terms.

The nature of this new vision is radically different from its court-bound aristocratic ethos in its earthy physicality. Lynette R. Muir points to the historic

³ Holly A. Crocker, "Introduction: The Provocative Body of the *Fabliaux*," *Comic Provocations: Exposing the Corpus of Old French Fabliaux*, ed. Holly A. Crocker. Studies in Arthurian and Courtly Cultures (New York and Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 1–14; here 1.

⁴ Kyril Petkov, "Mobility and Resentment in a World of Flux: Arrogance in the Old French *Fabliaux*," *Comic Provocations*, ed. Holly A. Crocker, 113–27; here 113.

⁵ Petkov, "Mobility and Resentment," 114.

context of the *fabliaux*, remarkable for their transgressively ribald humor, “a lusty, uninhibited enjoyment of physical reality which is the keynote of the thirteenth century.”⁶ Much *fabliaux* comedy resides in that physicality, as opposed to puns or other intellectual dimensions. Mary Jane Schenck notes that critics have frequently referred to “the ribald nature of the narratives, their verse form, and prominent themes such as adultery. Yet the thorny problem of what differentiates *fabliaux* as a form, from anecdotes on similar subjects has not been resolved.”⁷ One major differentiating characteristic is the reversal of power and order emerging from the dialogic tension which inevitably evokes comedy and even laughter. Despite their “indefinability” and resistance to taxonomic designations, comedic counter-normative rebellion is painted into this hybrid mix—across their narratives and even styles, distinguishing them from other types and unifying them to each other. An unrestrained joy in this deviance marks them as Bakhtinian. My claim is that *fabliau* genre embodies a rejection of the then current, unjust hierarchy of upper and lower class roles, and posits an opposite, temporary, equitable social hierarchy. M.M. Bakhtin has posited a humorous effect from such a power inversion in instances such as Mardi Gras. Laughter results from this clash of the ordinary and extraordinary, the real and the hypothetical, the humor and irony that result from such an inversion. To date, no other study of how Bakhtinian elements inform the *fabliau* genre has been produced.

Within the context of dialogic, social, sexual, political, gender-related, familial, clerical, and interpersonal tensions, *fableors* reverse traditional dominance while flaunting joyful hilarity, or black humor. Disguises, themselves often humorous, facilitate deception against a powerful antagonist; rebellion is standard. However, little discussion on Bakhtinianism or the use of literal, symbolic, and allegorical description has clarified this transgression. No traditional hero wins in a Bakhtinian topsy-turvy world of power inversion and role reversal which comically puts down the socially prominent and thereby raises up the socially disempowered, often to the joy of the latter, and the audience. Christian Sheridan explains why the inversion phenomenon occurs in the following way:

[D]ifferent models of economic structure [gift, barter, and money economies] and the social logic they imply can explain the mutability of the *fabliau* as a genre and the mobility of their audience(s) . . . Different models of economic organization require different conceptions of the self . . . [t]he very definition of personhood itself. Since the *fabliaux* date from a particularly volatile period in economic history—the so-called

⁶ Lynette R. Muir, *Literature and Society in Medieval France: The Mirror and the Image 1100–1500* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985), 87.

⁷ Mary Jane Schenck, *The Fabliaux: Tales of Wit and Deception*. Purdue University Monographs in Romance Languages, 24 (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1987), Introduction, x.

commercial revolution of the long thirteenth century — it is perhaps not surprising that they record such a contest over social roles.⁸

These lower social roles of faithful wife, holy cleric, dutiful servant, honest husband gain power by becoming their opposite: unfaithful, unholy, disrespectful, dishonest, and thereby upend the social hierarchy as they grasp power from their social betters, and ultimately win the contest of supremacy. Furthermore, as David Murray notes, “Bakhtin sees the overturning of official unitary languages as coming from the unheard, unofficial voices generated in the less-recognized areas of society, and this life-enhancing debunking of the official he calls *carnivalization* after the model of medieval carnival with its release of folk energies.”⁹ These releases of energies manifest themselves in laughter.

The *fabliaux* are Bakhtinian or carnivalesque insofar as they transgress the social order and applaud its life-enhancing Dionysian debunking. The joyfully sensual acceptance of the counter-normative and earthy is marked by the following characteristics: 1) role-playing, disguise, or being someone you are not; this would include parody of people or events (Noah’s flood), and might be allegorical; 2) role-reversals, especially of the villain and the courtois, the dispossessed and the powerful, as at Mardi Gras; 3) intrigue, surprise, uncertainty, danger, adventure, or thrills; 4) deception and trickery, especially of a person of a higher social order; 5) game-playing and ritual repetition (often three instances or three times three, as in folk-tales); 6) a Dionysian sense of abandon, unrestraint or license; 7) high-spirited hilarity and fun, joyful satisfaction in upsetting the social order; 8) temporary social disruption accepted as exciting and wondrous, not cataclysmic; 9) a tension between actual and perceived reality, one source of irony, and a willing acceptance of the absurd, unlikely or impossible; 10) spite and vengeance revealing an underlying hostility and rejection of the social order; 11) acceptance of cruelty and disdain, hence a needed emotional distance; often using sex as punishment; anti-feminist and anti-politically correct; 12) use of long-held traditional/ritual “events;” 13) of the common people, their bawdy language and actions; joyfully raucous and undignified with an unbridled life-affirming energy, and celebration at being the winners; not elitist or aristocratic in sympathy; 14) a controlled perspective or point of view as the narrator poses and postures; Lacy claims that “narrative commentary and digression [may] remove our attention from the anecdote and refocus it on a point or plane outside it. We experience narrating activity rather than narrative,”¹⁰ which itself is subversive; 15) comic

⁸ Christian Sheridan, “Conflicting Economies in the *Fabliaux*,” *Comic Provocations*, 97–111; here 97.

⁹ David Murray, “Dialogics: Joseph Conrad: *Heart of Darkness*,” *Literary Theory at Work: Three Texts*, ed. Douglas Tallack (London: B. T. Batsford, 1987), 115–34; here 116.

¹⁰ Norris J. Lacy, *Reading Fabliaux*. Garland Reference Library of the Humanities, 1805 (New York and London: Garland, 1993), 143.

manipulation through narrative over-determination, carefully orchestrated timing, happenstance (It happened that . . . Fortuitous, if unlikely circumstances, rather like a time out of time), effective / appropriate controlled authorial pacing; 16) a return to the status quo at the end, often hastily concluded with no more fanfare than a joyful carnivalesque celebration of victory.

Through these sixteen tropes, the tales are made aggressively anti-normative, countering accepted protocol, even being revolutionary, albeit in a comic mode. The Bakhtinian sense of reversal, akin to Mardi Gras when servants and masters reverse their relationships—of roles, of expected actions, of events, of social power, bring the audience to laughter.

Versatility and the ability to encompass a wide-ranging spectrum of issues: social, sexual, political, gender-related, familial, clerical, dialogic, and interpersonal also mark the genre, although no rigid definition can do justice to such a fluid, encompassing form. As Lacy contends, “usual definitions of the genre artificially restrict our understanding by imposing rigid generic boundaries, thereby excluding from consideration works that may be very much like *fabliaux*—or that may in fact be *fabliaux*.”¹¹ Similarly, Schenck points out that the word *fabliau* has been used loosely to refer to any slightly ribald tale When other critics have attempted to define the term, there have been frequent references to the ribald nature of the narratives, their verse form, and prominent themes such as adultery. Yet the thorny problem of what differentiates the *fabliaux* as a form, from anecdotes on similar subjects has not been resolved.

Despite their “indefinability” and resistance to taxonomic designations, into this hybrid mix an indelible streak of counter-normative rebellion is painted across their narratives and even their styles, which distinguishes them from other types of stories and unifies them to each other. Within each of the dialogic, social, sexual, political, gender-based, familial, clerical, and interpersonal tensions, *fabliaux* authors have maintained a consistent non-conformity by flaunting transgressive actions, images, speech, behavior, and attitudes about bodies, dead and alive. They implicitly suggest a reversal of traditional power dominances in surprising and often humorous ways.

Little attention has been devoted to the nature, as opposed to the genre, of the *fabliaux*, particularly its transgressive qualities, and the methods of representation utilized within it—literal, symbolic, and allegorical. Specifically, *fabliaux* such as *De l’arme qui guangna paradis par plait* (*The Peasant Who Argued His Way into Heaven*), *Du cuvier* (*The Tub*), and *Le flabel d’Aloul* (*The Fable of Aloul*) reveal the varied Bakhtinian possibilities for humorous transgression within the genre.

¹¹ Lacy, *Reading Fabliaux*, 143.

This elastic category of one hundred sixty Old French (and about six Middle English) tales easily encompasses variegated anti-normative behavior: embarrassment, humiliation, shame, physical and mental abuse, trickery, coarse bathroom humor, sexual degradation, castration, beating, and even murder. Its language eschews polite refinement, throwing coarse vocabulary in the audience's face, albeit with a smirk, a nudge or a wink. Parodic and ironic treatment of other genres such as courtly romance, social groups such as the clergy, internal circumstances such as repetitive, futile behavior, and language through sacrilege and irreverence distinguish this genre from others. Subversion is also evidenced in power inversions which deviate from the norm — wives supplanting husbands, peasants supplanting aristocrats, clerks supplanting priests, youth supplanting old age — in such unimpassioned or downright cruel fashion as to encourage ironic retribution. This drive for mutability, what Gaunt calls "a mistrust of fixed hierarchies," embodies flying in the face of established protocol.

Generally violence is perpetrated against victims perceived as unworthy, such as lascivious friars or abbesses (*De .iii dames qui troverent .i. vit / The Three Women who Found a Penis*), young bridegrooms (*Jouget*, narrated by one Colin Malet), stupid husbands (*De la saineresse / The Healer*), greedy bordello owners (*De Boivin de Provins / Boivin of Provins*), and the like. The role of social deviant may fluctuate, being variously shared by victims and/or victors. The usually unnamed *fabliaux* authors have created an environment of degradation in which an also unnamed victim, lacking in sophistication or finesse, becomes the butt of a joke or a fool to be laughed at, in a comic rendition of his or her undoing. But when this violence is heaped upon a domestic partner or other family member, the malice is multiplied, compounded by disloyalty or infidelity. Anti-marital *fabliaux* offer counter-normative subversion, as in the deception comprising *De la Saineresse / The Healer*.

Fabliaux subversion is elucidated in challenges to social mores in the following ways: in action, such as a wife subverting her husband, in crude dialogue, in conventionally unaccepted narration, and insofar as it is representational, in its distance from reality, its fictive nature. Punitive reprisal is seen levied against those in power positions, as those in subservient positions get the best of them. Generic characteristics of most *fabliaux* include a great specificity of locus, in a specifically named place and occasionally time, which grounds the tale in realism but generally has no relevance to the rest of the story. Its physical grounding in time and place substitutes for an ethical grounding, a moral sense, which the genre firmly eschews. According to V. A. Kolve, "The exclusions of the genre are as decisive as its preference, chief among them the fact that no one—not the characters, not the author, not the person that the reader or auditor is invited to think of himself as being—apprehends the action 'under the aspect of eternity,' in

terms of good and evil, heaven or hell.”¹² In other words, the genre’s content is amoral and anti-normative in this respect because it ignores, dismisses, or disregards any moral import, or any damage to others, much like a children’s cartoon presenting actions bereft of consequences. As Schenck notes, the publisher of the first *fabliaux* collection (1756–1760), Etienne Barbazon, is “sensitive to the possibility that the tales would offend standards of public, if not private, taste. He goes to some length to apologize for their vulgarity, and he attributes it to the naivete of the medievals.”¹³ While modern critics are unlikely to agree with his evaluation of medieval naivete, verbal transgression indeed marks the tales.

Regardless of how outrageous, how hurtful, or how exploitative any actions might be, no awareness of guilt or responsibility is anywhere allowed. The greater good of the community or a victimized member within it is ignored or scoffed at. The typical *fabliaux* template utilizes a sly, sneaky, wily, clever person, duplicitous and unworthy, whose audience forgives his deception because of his cleverness, itself an anti-social response. Schenck notes that “As an archetypal form of typical Gallic wit, the *fabliaux* scorns ignorance and pretension while celebrating the new intellectual and sensual values of the commercial regions of thirteenth-century France.”¹⁴ Kolve speaks of moral transgression in claiming

Characters in such stories live, for the most part, as though no moral imperatives existed beyond those intrinsic to the moment. They inhabit a world of cause and effect, pragmatic error and pragmatic punishment, that admits no goals beyond self-gratification, revenge, or social laughter—the comedic celebration of any selfishness clever enough to succeed.¹⁵

In fact, that cleverness seems to exonerate the perpetrator, who never suffers the consequences of his immoral behavior, and often profits by it. Never is compensation or assistance considered to remunerate the often-foolish victim of outrageous destructive actions. Game, and not social welfare is the narrative intent. Lacy claims that these texts are “characterized by the quest for entertainment, humor, and good fun.”¹⁶

Time and place specificity, on the other hand, does not extend to characters’ personal names. Few *fabliaux* figures are named, perhaps as an attempt to protect their characters if they are deceptive, to ward off shame in a shame culture if they are duped, to diminish emotional involvement by the audience and maintain a comic, not tragic mode and tone. Yet they are more than types, possessing a

¹² V. A. Kolve, *Chaucer and the Image of Narrative: The First Five Canterbury Tales* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1984), 160.

¹³ Schenk, *The Fabliaux*, 6.

¹⁴ Schenk, *The Fabliaux*, 120.

¹⁵ Kolve, *Chaucer and the Image of Narrative*, 160.

¹⁶ Lacy, *Reading Fabliaux*, 143.

certain fluid individuality. Unnamed stereotypical characters—husbands, wives, knights, travelers, priests, clerks—populate the genre, whose victims are dismissively ignored, partly because they sometimes themselves are resilient, and again like cartoon characters, bounce back from their seeming devastation. However, no pity is reserved for those who succumb to the abuse. Kolve remarks that

The company is made up of familiar types—avaricious merchants, restless wives, suspicious husbands, bragging cowards, lecherous priests, clever clerks—all of them persons who have traveled a certain distance down life's road, show some dust from the journey, and are able to assimilate a further lesson or two without too serious a loss of social composure.¹⁷

However, the duped husband, brothel Madam, or other victim is also generally an unworthy or unsavory character, with whom the audience feels no particular bond. This allows for the duping to be funny, and not pathetic. In a *fabliaux* world, we accept the wife of a rich vavasour as a love object despite the transgressive vow-breaking this would imply in a romance or realistic world. Because characters are nameless types, tales are free to be more irreverent and to invert authority.

Furthermore, the man of higher social class, aristocratic or clerical, is often duped by one of lower social class—clearly anti-normative; thus the tale objects to established political hierarchy, and attempts to level the field by the duping.

I. Du Cuvier (The Tub)

Such anti-clerical and anti-marital subversion is evidenced in *Du Cuvier (The Tub)* as Bakhtinian social role reversal shapes its carnivalesque element. The author posits the grounds of this short tale as extremely normative, almost prim and proper, making the violation all the more rebellious. The story recounts

. . . un marcheant qui par la terre
aloit marcheandise querre;
en sa meson lessoit sa fame,
que de son ostel estoit dame.
Il gaaignoit a grant mesaise,
& ele estoit & bien & aise
quant il ert alez gaaignier,
& ele se fesoit baingnier

¹⁷ Kolve, *Chaucer and the Image of Narrative*, 161.

avoec .i. clerc de grant franchise
ou ele avoit s'entente mise.¹⁸

[. . . a merchant who once plied
his trade throughout the countryside,
leaving at home his lawful spouse
to act as mistress of the house.
While he toiled hard to earn a living,
his wife, while he was gone, was living
in comfort and in luxury,
having to keep her company
a jolly cleric, whom she loved.
They'd sit together in the tub. (5–14)]¹⁹

If the enterprising merchant goes about the country legitimately pursuing his business in a true husbandly role and expects his lawful wife to do the same in her domain, tend the house as diligent mistress, he is sadly, albeit unknowingly countered. Her place in the tub, her companion the pastor, her comfortable, luxurious occupation are unexpected, unbefitting the role of a wife—no doubt anti-normative in her husband's perception. One day the merchant's early return with three guests inverts the subversive pair's activities as well as their tub.

. . . ele & li clers sanz atargier
sont andui sailli su cuvier.
Ele sailli hors toute nue,
au plus tost qu'el [p]ot s'est vestue;
la dame, qui n'estoit pas fole,
l'eve gete desouz la sole
de la chambre si qu'el s'en cort
desouz de la sole en mi la cort.
El n'ot le clerc ou esloiningnier.

[she and the cleric in short order
come scrambling out of the warm water
with all their nudity exposed.
Quick as a flash the lady's clothed,

¹⁸ *Nouveau Recueil complet des fabliaux (NRCF)*, ed. Willem Noomen and Nico van den Boogaard. 10 vols. (Assen, Netherlands: Van Gorcum, 1983–1996). All Old French quotations are taken from this standard edition.

¹⁹ All translations in this article have been produced by Nathaniel E. Dubin (copyrighted 1998). I am grateful to him for his creative translations and extensive assistance. Dubin's texts are identical to Noomen's except in two places where Noomen emends the manuscript and Dubin keeps the original reading; they punctuate differently, however, which may lead to or reflect different readings of the texts. Dubin's translations follow his reading and punctuations, and may sometimes appear to translate something other than what Noomen's text says, but this is not in fact the case.

and keeping all her wits about,
 she quickly pours the water out
 between the floor-boards, lets it flow
 away over the ground below,
 but she can't get the priest outside;
 he crawls beneath the tub to hide. (31–40)]

The misplaced water is easily disposed of, but not as easily the misplaced priest. However, the duped man inadvertently locks the perpetrator under the inverted tub as he spreads a tablecloth over it for their refreshment, making the locus a subversive, if imprisoning place.

To complicate matters, the neighbor owning the tub suddenly requests its return, a disastrously vulnerable position for the priest to be in. Although the wife's refusal to return the tub disturbs her dutiful husband, she remains adamant, needing to protect her priest-lover. Fortunately for the wife, her astute neighbor recognizes her dilemma (has she been in a similar situation herself?), and collaboratively remedies the problem by hiring a poor passer-by to yell "fire": "& quant li marcheant l'oïrent, / trestuit ensamble au cri saillirent" (And when the merchants heard the shout, / they jumped up and went running out;" 131–32), facilitating the priest's escape. Here the wife has been able to get away with adulterous behavior without being caught. More importantly, she chose to have this extramarital relationship in a sacrosanct and intimate place—the home—where she goes so far as to utilize the tub, another object typical of female space and activity, and yet was able to escape discovery.

Despite the humor motivating the tales, a distinct flatness, a distancing un-humanness, also marks the genre, allowing for the unpalatable disagreeableness. According to Thomas D. Cook, "Behind the humdrum settings and ordinary people of the fabliaux, beneath the piles of crude obscenities and the bizarre workings of the plots significance lies."²⁰ As noted above, that significance lies in the Bakhtinian rejection of the current, unjust status quo, and the positing of a more equitable social hierarchy to replace it. The clash of the ordinary and the extraordinary, the existing and the hypothetical, add to the humor. Kolve speculates:

The end sought is laughter, not meditation and a counter-truth. The actions are swift, the stories short, and there is little room for detailed characterization: a person is what he does, and one or two actions tell us all we will ever learn about him; for the rest, there is only his membership, already real or (by the end of the tale) at last begun, in a company of more less grown-up people.²¹

²⁰ Thomas D. Cook, *The Old French and Chaucerian Fabliaux: A Study of Their Comic Climax* (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 1978), 137.

²¹ Kolve, *Chaucer and the Image of Narrative*, 161.

I agree that the primary goal is gaming, but redressing of inequities, albeit in a fictive environment, is evidenced as well. Sometimes a certain sorrow, perhaps for the transgression against victims it must perpetrate, as well as shock, attends this narrative form despite the authors' intended, even successful humor.

The anti-normative inversion of Carnival, in which social roles are inverted, skewed, and misaligned, accounts for much of the seasonal festivities. In the same way, the counter-cultural inversion of the *fabliaux* evoke humor in their putatively inappropriate distribution of power. Mikhail Bakhtin indicates that "Because of their sensuous character and their strong element of play, carnival images loosely resemble certain artistic forms, namely the spectacle."²² I would suggest that similarly the *fabliaux* share these elements, heightened by the upheaval, the reversal of the normative, which make them simultaneously more humorous and more cold-hearted. The lack of any true import, any salvific dimension in the genre, further alienates it from normative expectations. The view of human experience, the apprehension of human nature as duplicitous, and the lack of truth behind any given narrative adds to the anti-normative character and even the audience's sense of alienation from people or plot. Sometimes these views are just too outrageous for the audience to relate to. Kolve finds a Chaucerian *fabliau* transgressive, maintaining,

The Miller's answer to *The Knight's Tale* not only presents a contrary view of human experience, but required of Chaucer the invention of a counter-art: non-hieratic, non hieratic, addressing no truth beyond itself: [through] techniques intended to subvert the characteristic role of the image in mediating between fictional event and doctrinal or philosophic truth. In one case, a "'field image' is created, without a symbolic center; in two others, the action is cast in a parodic mode, with 'game' as its exclusive intent."²³

Thus, *fabliaux* writers use philosophy and its pragmatic narration to counter social norms in their clever tales. The anti-normative presumption of amorality in the genre finally dominates our expectations, a view Kolve well summarizes: "In this world of winner and loser, duper and duped, life is a compromising business; it is no great shock to discover, in the course of the action, yet another way in which a person can use or be used."²⁴

In addition, the genre displays a kind of disreputableness, not primarily in its transgressive and blatant use of sexual and scatological words and deeds—but because it is representational, symbolic, sometimes even allegorical, not offering merely a one-to-one correspondence to reality, a single, unequivocal meaning. In

²² Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helen Iswolsky (1968; Bloomington and Indianapolis: University of Indiana Press, 1984), Introduction, 7.

²³ Kolve, *Chaucer and the Image of Narrative*, 160.

²⁴ Kolve, *Chaucer and the Image of Narrative*, 161.

this respect, it might be considered less than “true,” as Plato believed of poetry, finding it fabulous rather than literally accurate. Howard Bloch suggests that “Ultimately, the disreputableness of poetry lies in the mobility of its signs—the prince who is a page and, indeed, the page that we read; the page that ‘knows how to speak all languages.’ Every semblance is, according to the above inscription of the poet as a ‘quick-change artist,’ a Faux-Semblant.”²⁵ This can be extended to all poetry and its methods of displaying its wares: simile, metaphor, imagery, allegory. The very fact of representation, in this schema, would be faux-semblant / false seeming, but there is more “faux in fabliaux” than in other genres. One might consider imagery such as the horn in Roland signifying Roland, virgins wearing shredded clothing which represent themselves or their state in Chrétien, the bird, who represents the woman herself, fed to the lover in Marie de France’s *Lauistic*. Man is a ‘representing’ animal and hence a dissembling one. Language, especially as representation of something other than itself, is thus a mark of human beings’ identity, itself a representation of an object or concept by a word. Is there any more opprobrium attached to poetry than language itself for its quality of falseness? This falseness to an ontological world, a game-playing technique to emphasize deception in humorous or serious fashion, is indeed transgressive, and such authors are indeed literary transgressors.

II. De l’arme qui guangna paradis par plait (The Peasant Who Argued His Way into Heaven)

Even more interesting, the genre seems simultaneously normative and transgressive: it uses the protocol of society and its culture, but often turns it on its head theoretically, in utilizing representation, and practically, in creating a socially shocking tale, defying expected values in its content, language, or intent. How often, for example, does one expect a peasant to best saints or even the Almighty? Such a Bakhtinian inversion of power-positions is so extreme as to be ludicrous. Nevertheless, *De l’arme qui guangna paradis par plait* / *The Peasant Who Argued His Way into Heaven*, one of the most interestingly transgressive tales, reveals just such a humorous inversion. The fabliau does not rely on sexuality or cuckoldry as a means of defiance; rather its joke rests on heretically distorted religious doctrine, and the clever way it is subverted for personal gain.

Both sentence language and plot sophistication are artificially simple, almost in a tone of joke-telling. In noting the death of a peasant long ago, the tale offers the

²⁵ R. Howard Bloch, *The Scandal of the Fabliaux* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 34.

irrelevant detail that the event occurred early one Friday, and never returns to this fact. The soul well knows Christian doctrine, both the means for meriting Heaven and biblical accounts of previous sins by now-influential saints. The normative expectation of the author is that at death either an angel or devil should materialize to haul away the soul, but here no such creature appears. The peasant's soul cleverly

. . . garda sor destre vers le ciel
 & vit l'arcangle saint Miciel
 qui portoit une ame a grant joie;
 après li a tenu sa voie.
 Tant suï l'angle, ce m'est vis,
 que il entra em paradis;
 après lui est laidens entree.

[looked up toward Heaven on its right:
 Archangel Michael in plain sight
 was bearing a soul, jubilant,
 and, following, the peasant went
 behind the angel, till he spies
 them enter into Paradise
 and enters heaven, as had they.

(13–19)]

Defying the usual protocol of being escorted into its afterlife repose, our unnamed peasant soul simply sneaks in. Nor does the ingenuity stop there. Saint Peter confronts the soul not for its bold transgression in entering unaccompanied, but for the more basic sin of its occupation:

“Çaiens n’a nus herbergement
 se n’est par mon commandement.
 Ensorquetot, par saint Germain,
 nos n’avons cure de vilain
 & vilains n’a rein en cest estre.
 Plus vilains de vos n’i puet estre!”

[“Within these halls none come to live
 who do not do so by my leave.
 Foremost and first, by Saint Germain,
 we’ve no desire to entertain
 a peasant—they’ve nothing to do
 here. That goes for the likes of you!”

(25–30)]

Surely the audience would recognize Saint Peter's heretical dogma that social class determines acceptance into Heaven, an emotional strike against that usually revered figure, and a reversal of normative expectations. Further they would

appreciate the soul's verbal expertise and arguing style: rather than being on the defensive, it cagily reminds that Porter of his own shortcomings:

Petit i conquestas d'onor
quant renoias Nostre Seignor;
molt fu petite vostre fois,
quel renoiastes par trois fois
que n'estiés de sa compagne.
Ceste maisons ne vos adagne,
ains het vos & vostre manoir;
ne devés pas les clez avoir—
alés fors o les desloiaus!—
mais je sui prodom & loiaus
s'i doi bien estre par droit conte."

["It redounds little to your pride
That by you Our Lord was denied.
Your faith must have been very small,
For you denied three times in all
that you were of His retinue.
This dwelling wasn't made for you,
it hates you and your living here,
you shouldn't have the keys you wear—
go join the traitors and disloyal!
By every right I, as a loyal
and good man, may stay in this place."

(35–45)]

The confident soul thus bullies the esteemed gatekeeper in a boldly transgressive accusation to which the audience cannot help but assent. Here is a soul sticking up for its rights against a man who himself has transgressed, and additionally has instituted a counter-normative condition for entering heaven. Thus the content of this segment, Saint Peter's doctrine of no peasants in Heaven, the soul's defiant rejection of it, and its disrespectful accusation, are all transgressive. They are Bakhtinian in their power reversal, their comedy, and their inverted role dominance.

The soul's next target is the arrogant Saint Thomas who adamantly repeats Peter's contrary dogma while adding elitist insults—a Bakhtinian transgression—to the morally righteous soul:

"Vilain, ce li dist li apostres,
icil manoirs est cuites nostres
& as martirs & as confés.
En quel liu as tu les biens fes
par qoi tu dois çaiens manoir?
Il n'i doit vilains remanoir:
ço est la maizons as cortois"

["Peasant, the Lord God made this place for us apostles,"
 Thomas says,
 "and His confessors and His martyrs.
 Where did you do good works, and what is
 it that says you may reside
 in a place peasants are denied?
 For genteel souls this place was meant." (55–61)]

Once again the militant soul responds with an offensive attack upon the sainted authority, scathingly accusing him of his faults:

"En estes vos cel qui desistes
 as apostres, dont ert seü
 que il avoient Deu veü
 emprés le resusitement?
 Vos fesistes vo sairement
 que vos ja ne le kerriés
 se vos les plaies ne veiés
 qu'en crois avoit reçut vo Mestre.
 Çaiens ne devés vos pas estre,
 car faus fustes & mescreans!"

["Did you not cagily defy
 the apostles to tell you what
 made them so sure they had seen God
 after he'd risen from the dead?
 You swore you doubted this and said\
 that this could never be believed
 until you saw the wounds received
 on the cross where the Master died.
 You are not worthy to abide
 here, disbelieving and dishonest." (64–73)]

The forthright boldness and disrespect the soul utters to venerable churchmen is contrary to expectations, for the audience would expect ingratiating groveling, begging, or at least an honest presentation of the soul's merits. On the other hand the audience finds this counter-normative rebellion appealing, even humorous, in its audacity, and identifies with the outrage of social discrimination.

Next, the undaunted soul takes on the mighty Saint Paul, who gruffly repeats the prior heretical presumptions:

"Vilain, fait il, qui vos conduist?
 Çaiens ne doit vilains entrer
 ne herbergier ne habiter.
 Que fesistes vos la deserte

que la porte vos fu overte?
Wide paradis, vilains faus!"

[. . . "Who brought you here, peasant?
No peasant is allowed to come
here to shelter or make his home.
What worthy actions did you do
That Heaven's gates opened for you?
Get out of Heaven, base-born soul!"

(82–87)]

Saint Paul's transgressive double-barreled attack on his behavior and social status generates the still undaunted soul's third acerbic defense, offensively challenging Paul with his shortcomings:

"— Cui, fait l'ame, dans Pols li caus,"
estes vos? "As sains? As tirans?
Tant fustes oribles tirans,
jamais si crueus ne sera;
Sains Estevenes le conpara,
cui vos fesistes lapider.
Bien sai vo vie recorder:
les commans a Deu desdegniés,
en quel liu que vos veniés
tot estoient mort li saint ome,
Deus vos dona sor cele some
une bufë a main enflee—
del marcié & de le paumee
devés vos enqore le vin.
Ha, Deus! quel saint & quel devin!
Qant çaiens ont li buen confort,
par foit, vos i estes a tort!

[Cu]idiés que bien ne vos conoisce?"
["Whose man are you, baldheaded Paul?"
It asks. "The saints'? The torturers'?"
A crueller tyrant never was,
nor will there ever be a harder.
You made blessed Steven a martyr
and had him stoned. Let me retell
your sinful life—I know it well!
You scorned the laws God instituted,
and saintly men were executed
wherever you were to be found.
God struck you down on that account;
with his own mighty hand He laid
you out, and for the deal you made
you've yet to pay the round of wine.

God! What a saint! What a divine!
 When this is where the just belong
 to find you here is clearly wrong” (88–104)]

Each of his renowned accusers this rebellious soul has soundly trounced, for none of them can refute its valid accusations. Like the reversal of Mardi Gras when the socially lower is raised and the socially higher is lowered, the lowly peasant soul has emerged victorious. The demolished accuser’s only recourse is to acknowledge this truth shamefully, that their own presence in Heaven may itself be transgressive, so he admits “Endroit mo a il conquete” (“He’s won a victory,” 112), and allow him to remain. When Saint Peter, rather irritated, reports to God, “Par parole nos a vaincus / Je meismes sui si conclus” (“By argument the peasant has vanquished / us all. I am myself so anguished,” 117–18), “Fait Nostre Sire: ‘Jo riai” (“I’ll go,” says Our Lord, 120). This culminating exchange repeats the prior anti-conventional dogma when Our Lord defends the status quo and challenges:

“Çaiens n’entrada onques mais ame
 sans conduit, o d’ome o de fame.
 Mes apostles as blastengiés
 & avilles & laidengiés.
 Comment cuidiés ci remanoir?
 [“. . . Here no soul may enter,
 woman’s or man’s, that’s not been sent for.
 When my apostles you’ve defamed
 and vilified and roundly blamed,
 by what right do you think to stay?” (125–29)]

However shockingly, the logical soul rebuts the Deity with a valid argument he cannot refute, claiming:

“ — Sire, ausi bien i doi manoir
 com il font, se jugement ai,
 car onques ne vos renoiai,
 n’onques ne mescreï vo cors,
 ne par moi ne fu sains om mors,
 mais tot ce firent il jadis
 & si sont ore em paradis
 [“Lord, I have as much right as they
 to be here. Right is on my side.
 By me you were never denied,
 nor did I waver in my trust
 nor raise my hand against the just,
 transgressions they all have behind them,
 yet here in Paradise we find them.” (130–36)]

After recounting the evidence, the corporal works of mercy it engaged in while alive, the soul concludes with valid dogma, noting

qui ensi muert, on nos sermone
 que Deus ses pecciés li pardone.
 Vos savés bien se j'ai voir dit.
 Çaiens entrai sans contredit.
 Quant çaiens sui, por que en iroie? —
 vostre parole desdieroie,
 car otroié avés sans falle
 qui çaiens est, puis ne s'en alle.
 Vos ne mentirés ja por moi!
 — Amis, fait Deus, & je t'otroi

["... we are told God will erase
 the sins of those who die in grace.
 You know the truth of what I've said.
 That I am here can't be gainsaid;
 when I'm here, should I be evicted? —
 Your own word would be contradicted,
 for by your promise you made clear
 none shall be seized who shelter here
 for my sake would you be belied?
 "Friend," says the Lord, you may abide."

(153–62)]

Indeed, the tale is historically subversive in presenting three saints and the Lord as unjust and even heretical; it turns cultural presumptions upside down when only the soul speaks truth, and that soul must fight for its righteous place in the afterlife—all with Bakhtinian glee! The tale concludes with an inverted statement of vice, noting five counter-normative proverbs which ignore the moral victory of the soul:

Li vilains dist en son proverbe
 que mains om a a tort *requis*
 ce qu'en plaidier a puis conquis:
 noretüre vaint mais nature,
 fausetés amorce droiture,
 tors va avant & drois a orce,
 mels valt engiens que ne fait force.

[Here's what the peasant's proverbs teach:
 by argument are vindicated
 many claims falsely arrogated,
 nature is overcome by nurture,
 the truth falls prey to those who perjure,
 wrong flourishes and cripples right,
 and trickery is worth more than might.

(166–72)]

This shocking sentiment, not a warning but a declaration, is subversive and counter-intuitive, precisely reversing audience expectations. Not only is the *The Peasant who Argued His Way into Heaven* transgressive in banning peasants per se, and allowing this peasant in, but it also portrays the saints as transgressive in their false beliefs, using criteria other than virtue as the means test for salvation.

III. Le fabel d'Aloul (the Fable of Aloul)

Despite, or perhaps because of its Bakhtinian comic transgression, the genre has flourished with devotees spanning centuries and countries.²⁶ Nathaniel E. Dubin's translation of "Le fabel d'Aloul" aptly reveals its humorous trickery against a ridiculous husband, demonstrating several generic features. The well-to-do farmer Aloul is revealed as foolish on five counts: he is greedy, excessive in love, counter-cultural, jealous, and suspicious as the following statements prove:

- 1) "Ne ja son vueil n'eust jor bien: / deniers amoit seur toute rien;"
("In no case would he spend his wealth, / He loved his coins beyond all else," 7–8);
- 2) "Alous l' amoit de grant amour . . . / Fame avoit assez bele & gent—"
("Great was Aloul's infatuation for his wife, lovely and fair," 14, 10);
- 3) Aloul "novelementl'ot espousee- / e'uns vavasours li (ot donee?)
this farmer ("recently had wed / A noble's daughter, 11–12) thus defying social class;
- 4) Alous "garde sa fame com jalous . . . Or est Alous toz sos provez;"
he ("keeps his wife like a jealous fool . . . which proves he's stupid, nothing truer," 16, 20);
- 5) Aloul "le mescroit a si grant tort" Aloul ("harbors suspicion without cause," 39).²⁷

For these and other reasons, the tale displays anti-normative attitudes and actions—culturally unseemly, gloriously unacceptable actions. Most often, physical violence, especially toward clerics as in this case, embodies such transgressive behavior. The Bakhtinian reversal of clerical superiority is here undermined. Aloul's foibles are sufficient to generate vengeance in his wife, who "dist que s'ele nel deçoit / dont sera ele molt mauvaise / selien en puet avoir & aise" ("Swore that he would be deceived / If she could find the place and time / Or else she wasn't worth a dime," 32–34). Ironically, until he becomes suspicious, he has no reason to be so; when he becomes so, he brings it upon himself. The

²⁶ See Albrecht Classen's *Deutsche Schwankliteratur des 16. Jahrhunderts: Studien zu Martin Montanus, Hans Wilhelm Kirchhof und Michael Lindener*. KOLA: Koblenz-Landauer Studien zu Geistes-, Kultur- und Bildungswissenschaft, 4 (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2009).

²⁷ See Peter G. Beidler's "Chaucer's French Accent: Gardens and Sex-Talk in the Shipman's Tale" *Comic Provocations*, ed. Holly A. Crocker, 149–61, especially 150–55, for an interesting and useful companion piece for "Aloul."

domestic conflict is set up based on distrust and its revenge. After two years, the unnamed wife finds her method when the also unnamed priest "*voit la dameau cors bien fet, / & bien sanchiez que molt li plect*" ("spies the lady's lovely form / And succumbs swiftly to her charm," 62). Overcoming her initial reluctance, the wife is triply anti-normative: first, in her adultery; second in her congress with a cleric, and third, in her promise to her lover, "*je vous donrai tant du mien / que toz jors mes serez mananz*" ("I'll give you from what I own / So much that you'll be rich from now on," 110–11), if he remains silent. She embodies the opposite of a true, wifely role and adds insult to injury by paying the priest for their trysts, recreating him as a prostitute.

The narrator justifies her disloyalty with his suspicion in commenting "*Fols est qui fame espie & guete! / Des or mes porra dire Alous- / si dira voir-que il est cous!*" ("Only a fool spies on his wife! / Now he can truly say, Aloul, / He's a cuckold died in the wool," 118–20). The suspicious Aloul "*se maudist & jure, / s'une autre foiz li avenoit / honte & ledure li feroit*" ("curses her and swears / That if she does so one time more / He'll hurt her and give her what for," 142–44). The environment has become more than comic or playful, but downright dangerous in its domestic violence—unpleasant, anti-social, counter-normative. When the stakes are raised by Aloul's threats, equivalent reprisals must follow. After Aloul discovers the locus of the encounter, the wet, trampled grass as "*. . . li piez li glace / que sa fame fu rafetie;*" ("his foot / slips in the place his wife has tumbled," 160–61), he becomes as used by the cleric as she, as taken advantage of, as victimized by the priest's unconventional, anti-normative crime. Although he "*en mal trepeil*" ("now confidently knows," 166), he deceptively feigns ignorance, waiting for the moment of his revenge.

When the wife leaves the door unlatched, having moved from victim to participant in this sexual game, the priest pees on its hinges to prevent squeaking, found their bed, "*est montez sus, / tost li a fet le ravescot*" ("got in and lay / on top and porked her, rest assured," 258–59), in this second encounter of the night. At first, Aloul thinks he is dreaming a prelate has "*s'avoit sa fame si surprise / & si l'avoit desouz lui mise*" ("taken his wife by surprise, / and now on top of her he lies," (235–36), but with dramatic irony, the audience knows this is not fantasy. With "*ot . . . croist & crisne & tranble*" ("bedstead cracking, creaking, shaking," 260–61), for Aloul, who is certainly not the fastest thinker, finally reality dawns upon him, "*Le prestre prent par son afere / & sache & tire & huche & crie*" ("seizes the priest by his sack / And tugs and pulls and yanks and cries," 270–71). Genre boundaries here mushroom to new proportions as the tale becomes complicated: domestic violence has spread beyond the family, and beyond the victim, to the perpetrator, indeed a cleric:

"Ceenz est ne sai qui venus
qui de ma feme m'a fet cop!"

& la dame par mi le cop
 saisi Aloul & par la gueule;
 li prestres de sa coille veule
 les dois par force li desserre
 & sache, si qu'il vint a terre
 en mi la chanbre, sor .i. aistre.

["Who knows who's come in here and taken
 my wife under my very nose!"
 The lady seizes Aloul close
 around the neck and by the jaw;
 the priest pries loose the iron paw
 that grips him by the hairy balls,
 pulls free, and to the ground he falls
 down in the room on a fire-pit.

(274–81)]

The wily escaping priest "fors tant qu'il entre en .i. toitel /ou brebis gisent &aignel" ("runs for cover in the shed / among the ewes and lambs," 295–96), an inverted savior in an anti-nativity scene redeeming no one. Aloul's searching with his phallic "tret s'espee" ("drawn sword," 306) is indeed impotent. The rough and tumble slapstick sex leading to comic-strip, temporarily sanitized injury, evokes humor, not pity. With the priest downed, and then in hiding, foolish husband Aloul pants: "a paine puet ravoit s'alaine / tant orent hustiné ensamble" ("Nor could he catch his breath again / Wrestling with his wife in their struggle," 302–03).

Meanwhile, back in the barn, the priest recovers his libido enough to rape the elderly, corpulent servant Hersent, the rape being anti-normative in the action and its elderly victim. Her role as servant is inverted as she is made into an unlikely sex-object. Equally anti-normative is Hersent's unexpected confusion when she puts her hands on his testicles:

Hersens i vint par aventure,
 ses mains geta sor ses coillons,
 si cuide que ce soit moutons
 qu'ele tenoit iluec endroit
 par la coille qui grosse estoit,
 & .i. poi met ses mains amont:
 velu le trueve & bien reont
 et .i. vaucel en la moiere.
 Hersent se trest .i. poi arriere,
 si se merveille que puet estre,

[Hersent by chance came to that spot
 And, on his nuts placing her hands
 Believed they had to be a ram's
 That she had taken hold of thus

Because they were voluminous
 She moved her hands up some and found it
 Covered with hair and also rounded,
 Split down the middle with a crease.
 Hersent drew herself back a piece
 Just what it was she had to wonder. (348–57)]

And the vicious games continue as both *verboten* actions and reporting of them are enacted and described. Aloul's amends are met with "wisoit os tels mariages, / & honis sont li miens parages / qui a tel homme m'ont donee!" ("fely spite, and both marital and parental complaints: / A plaguey pox on such a match! / And on the parents who would latch / Me up with him, curses and spite," 433–35).

Much like the melee ending Chaucer's *Miller's Tale*, a brawl in the dark generates misdirected punches from the cowherds which wound their master Aloul instead of his priestly adversary, their supposed recipient. The expectation of audience affiliation with the smarter propagator of evil against the foolish dupee is here ignored, as all characters appear disreputable and affiliation with anyone is impossible. Finally acknowledging his wife's complicity, Aloul now wants only to contain the damage: "& dist que ne face tel chose / dont il ait honte en mi la voie" ("And says that all he has to ask / is she not do him public shame," 428–29), in other words, he wishes she would not now outwardly defy norms and emasculate him.

After raping the servant, this amazingly potent priests climbs back on the wife a third time, while Aloul is in bed with her, defying convention and decent behavior. "Estrange honte m'avra fet!" ("How singular a disgrace this is," 466), he bemoans. Yet another psychological anomaly occurs when the violated servant Hersent deceptively eavesdrops on her master Aloul's plans for revenge, revealing them to her prior rapist, the prelate, yet another role inversion. Psychological theorists would have much to say about this. Thus the cleric is prepared for battle with Aloul, but after being beaten humorously (because unexpectedly), springs magically back like a Mighty Mouse cartoon. Again beatings ensue, now involving Aloul's surrogate worker Roger who pushes the priest down the stairs. In Bakhtinian fashion, the socially lower worker undoes the putatively superior cleric. The narrator counter-normatively queries: "qu'aloit il querre la folie?" ("What was he after, the damned fool?" 547). When Aloul and his cowherds come to rescue Roger, they become embroiled in yet another brawl with the priest. The narrator comments:

Lors recommence la granz gerre
 entre le prestre & les bouviars;
 molt i sera li assaus fiers.

[Once more the mighty war breaks forth
 between the prelate and that throng.
 Their combat will be fierce and long. (614–16)]

The repetitive pattern of sexual offense and beating without progress or change becomes a “Three Stooges” farce. Only with difficulty can one imagine the transgression of a man of the cloth so beaten—or beating others—swearing or being cursed—treated obnoxiously or treating others so. But the encounter continues, flying head over heels, with slapstick brutality: “ainz les couvint aval venir . . .” (“and right back down the stairs they tumble”) “les trebuchent & abatent / les pis, les testes lor debatent” (“One after the other, each loses / his balance, slips and falls and bruises”) “a terre par sont venu, / si cheïrent ensanble el fu” (“crashing down to earth / they landed squarely in the hearth,” 676, 683–84, 687–88).

Such a comic-book unrealistic portrayal of violence is even anti-normative. Aloul’s shocking plan is “cis prestre sont escoilliez” (“in getting this here priest castrated,” 710). And in fact, desecration of the priest’s body follows, against all expected cultural norms, and despite his supposedly sacred ecclesiastical role. Inadvertently, the disrespect begins. The hungry crew send Roger to seek food in the dark storage area, but he finds something very different in this prelate’s hiding place:

Endementiers que il le taste,
 le prestre saisi par la nache,
 par leus le trueve mole & dure,
 si cuide que ce soit presure
 c’on i seut pendre en tel maniere;
 avant retaste & puis arriere
 tant qu’il encontre les genous,
 si cuide avoir trové os cors
 c’on i ait mis por le sechier;
 forment se prist a merveillier
 de ce qu’il trueve tel harnas,
 sa main a mis de haut en bas,
 s’a encontré le vit au prestre,
 or ne set il que ce puet estre.

[Feeling about, what does he find
 and latch onto?—the priest’s behind.
 in places hard, in others soft,
 he thinks it’s tripe hanging aloft
 because they’d often hang it so.
 Once again, groping to and fro,
 up against the priest’s knees he comes,

which he assumes are knuckle bones
 that someone has hung up to dry,
 and since he can't imagine why
 they'd bother storing it like that,
 he moves his hand down till it met
 a penis (yes, again the priest's).
 Indeed, will wonders never cease? (801–14)]

Both unexpected, disrespectful, and anti-clerical, this offense is anti-normative, and very Bakhtinian. Although the priest promises his forgiveness and blessing,

Molt fust en males mains Rogiers
 ne fust la torbe des bouviers
 qui molt l'angoisse & molt l'apresse;
 ["Roger'd come to a sad passe
 all the herders in a mass
 both harry the priest and oppress him" (899–901)].

Their brawl awakens Aloul, who asks what to do with this belligerent priest:

Il respondent communement
 qu'il n'en puet fere vengeance
 de qoi on doie tant parler
 comme des coilles a coper.
 [" . . . they say right down to the last man
 if he wants vengeance the best plan
 's to cut off his family jewels—
 that sure would made folk talk! . . . (927–30)].

Hearing that Aloul has sent for a razor, "c'on dist de lui itel parole" ("that he's about to lose his tool," 939), the priest begs for mercy as a length of log is used to spread his legs. The drama heightens as Roger "si prent le prestre par la coille . . . Ja fust le prestre en mal toeille, / quant la dame le feu toeille" ("grasps the prelate by the balls. / The priest's prospects did not look bright. / Just then the lady doused the light," 960–62). The two victims of the priest's rapes now amazingly come to his rescue, viciously beating Aloul and company before spiriting the priest to safety. The expectation that rape victims would beat their rapist is here inverted, perhaps perpetuating the myth that women really want to be raped.

This not-so-short story of 986 lines is an Homeric Odyssey of ordeals overcome by wit or strength—but lacking a hero. As Gaunt, paraphrasing Gabrielle Lyons, argues, "Successful characters in the fabliaux . . . constantly use *savoir*, their wit and ingenuity, to undermine the position of other characters who believe that their

avoir, their place in a fixed social hierarchy, whether it be as a noble, a clerk or a husband, is god-given and unassailable."²⁸

Le Flabel d'Aloul negotiates its tale through that wit and ingenuity, much like Bakhtin's challenge to traditional order negotiates its way to combat a fixed social hierarchy. It likewise reveals variegated features of its genre, emphatically centering on internecine warfare in which everyone is hurt. The comic element is experienced from outside the tale by an audience and author who maintain emotional distance despite physical violence and adulterous disloyalty in circumstances not particularly humorous. Here, the comic resides not in the cleverness or wit of the "actors," but in an observer's feeling of superiority over them; the audience, in its empathy with the victims, experiences both vulnerability and viciousness in the actors' painful plights. The repetitive domestic abuse, surprising sexual intercourse of characters such as the priest and the servant Hersent, alternation of clever and foolish behavior, and intentional, gratuitous violence produce a tale of noisy sophistication, uncharacteristic versatility, defiant transgression, and literary acuity to broaden our definition of this slippery genre.

A feature of the literary genre of the *fabliaux* is that it accepts, encourages, and relies upon symbolism as a truth, as a legitimate way of reading. Many other disciplines—math, history, science, philosophy—find this kind of reading arbitrary, relativistic, and less than objectively true. They seek truth not in representation but in a more literal, concrete mode of reality, finding symbolism of poetry or fiction merely flights of fancy, unconnected to truth. But, drawing on the fact that language itself is representational, that words symbolize objects or qualities, literary critics forge on, symbolizing. If literature from any genre contains an implicit or explicit moral of any sort, it "represents," suggesting by exemplifying a narrative. The beauty of analogy, or imagery, is an intricate and splendid game, a way of opening up understanding, not a stumbling block to it. Knowledge is not cut and dried, but a splendid peacock opening its glittering feathers which an audience can see multi-dimensionally from various angles, dancing invitingly before us. Knowledge is not a single category, but a beautiful mixture of ideas from many sources and of many types.

However, contrary to the counter-normative elements in its content, *fabliaux* vocabulary level, diction, sentence structure, style, and all-pervasive rhyme are overwhelmingly, even determinedly, normative: colloquial, every-day, anti-elitist, purposefully unsophisticated, of the *hoi poloi*. The genre uses everyday speech patterns in rhymed couplets, even bordering on sing-song doggerel. Formulaic

²⁸ Gabrielle Lyons, "'Avoir' and 'Savor': A Strategic Approach to the Old French Fabliaux," Ph.D. dissertation, Cambridge, 1992. Quoted in Simon Gaunt, *Gender and Genre*, 235.

clichés, aphorisms, oaths, curses, and sacred or profane prayers color many characters' dialogue. Occasionally, the *fabliaux* may rehearse a Biblical event, in effect allegorizing the tale, but generally do so without intending to hearken to the original sacred event. As Kolve indicates of *The Miller's Tale*,

Chaucer attempts the witty and difficult business of writing about a second Flood without invoking, to any serious religious end, the meaning of the first. The means by which he sought to disengage this "new image" of the Flood from the moral and doctrinal significance that has accrued to its original text across centuries of exegesis involve matters of genre, imagery, and mode of action. Their complex interplay in relation to this great subject is as brilliant and audacious, and constitutes, on a level far deeper than the mimetic, the distinctive 'voice' of the Miller in his tale.²⁹

His French antecedents also parody sacred events in a secular context without intending religious carry-over from the mimesis.

Thus the genre can be called disreputable not for its transgressively blatant use of the sexual and scatological in word and actions, but for its quality of representation, not "being" but "indicating" other levels of meanings, not offering a one-to-one correspondence with reality, a single concrete meaning. This mobility of language signs is thus part of its transgression, its disreputableness, as is true of virtually all poetry and methods of displaying poetic wares: simile, metaphor, imagery, allegory. Poets, like other people who use language, are 'representing,' and hence dissembling beings. Add to this the transgression of inverting social status as does Bakhtin: the lower are exalted as the higher are humiliated, and another level of reversal reinforces the linguistic dissembling. Gaunt concludes that "The fabliaux like nothing better than destabilizing the medieval culture used to rationalize its social order and the internal hierarchies upon which it rested."³⁰

In many ways, the *fabliaux* genre is fully normative—in its colloquial expression, curses, and aphorisms, its speech-imitating rhymed couplets, its ordinary life situations lived by undignified or unremarkable characters, and its refusal to move from the baldly realistic to the idealistic.

However, its anti-hierarchic and -hieratic value system and its Bakhtinian carnivalesque inversions defiantly infuse plot, characters, dialogue, and language use. As Gaunt comments, "writers of *fabliaux* revel in the dismantling of the discourses, structures, and hierarchies through which the culture in which they lived made sense of its world and sought to justify its inequalities with morally ordered, divinely ordained schemes of human life and death."³¹ Often turning the

²⁹ Kolve, *Chaucer and the Image of Narrative*, 159–60.

³⁰ Gaunt, *Gender and Genre*, 237.

³¹ Gaunt, *Gender and Genre*, 239.

cultural and moral worlds on their heads to improve institutional inequities, the genre espouses or tacitly accepts that which is not normative: the transgressive, the subversive, the conventionally unacceptable, for greater creative freedom, simple comic joy, social and cultural revolution, and a redistribution of newly appropriated power.

Chapter 14

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Chaucerian Comedy: *Troilus and Criseyde*

Six centuries after his death, Geoffrey Chaucer, most celebrated of the medieval English poets, retains his stature as one of the handful of truly great comic writers of the English language. His fame as a comic poet rests principally on *The Canterbury Tales*, his collection of stories told by three women and twenty-six men, varied in social class, as they journey to the shrine of St. Thomas à Beckett in springtime. The most blatantly comic of these stories are *fabliaux*, the fourteenth-century English version of the Old French tales that flourished in the thirteenth century.¹ Chaucer's *fabliaux* are typically sexually and scatologically outrageous, with much of the comedy emerging as the story builds to its can-you-top-this climax. These are the tales that have won Chaucer's comic stature most decisively.

Another of Chaucer's ways of using comedy, however, is far less often discussed. Although Chaucer died before finishing *The Canterbury Tales*, he completed a second very important but radically different work. It is a very long narrative romance called *Troilus and Criseyde* (ca. 1385), and, although it is recognized as one of Chaucer's finest works, it is not famous for its comedy. The most recent collection of essays on *Chaucer's Humor*, for instance, does not include

¹ Chaucerians commonly discuss these stories as English *fabliaux*. Carl Lindahl, however, in *Earnest Games: Folkloric Patterns in the Canterbury Tales* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), argues that the French *fabliau* was never popular in English court circles and had lost its impact even in France before Chaucer's birth. Stressing the links between these stories and oral literature, he argues that they should instead be discussed as the descendants of *Schwänke*, oral tales that circulated throughout medieval Europe, 125–27. For a discussion of such tales, see Albrecht Classen, *Deutsche Schwankliteratur des 16. Jahrhunderts: Studien zu Martin Montanus, Hans Wilhelm Kirchhof und Michael Lindener*. Koblenz-Landauer Studien zu Geistes-, Kultur- und Bildungswissenschaften, 4 (Trier: WVT, Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2009).

a single article on the comedy in *Troilus and Criseyde*.² In several important scenes, however, comedy redefines the poem's impact. The most important of these scenes is one of the most subtly conceived love scenes in medieval English literature. Via comedy, Chaucer, master of the English *fabliau*, steeped in Old French *fabliau* and Italian novella alike, introduces into his scenes of romantic love an alien perspective on love's worth and meaning, the *fabliau* perspective: love as carnal desire.

This comedy never becomes *fabliau*-style comedy. Instead of building openly to a climax, as *fabliau* comedy typically does, this comedic undercurrent emerges, is glimpsed momentarily, and then submerges, repeatedly troubling the romance from just below its surface. Nevertheless, stressing the carnality of love as it does, this comedy is of great importance. Instead of contradicting romantic love's grandiose claims, it makes its own claim, slyly, leaving the reader floundering somewhere between the two great conceptions of the meaning of love.

"The Miller's Tale," the quintessential Chaucerian *fabliau*, illustrates well Chaucer's most famous comic form. A young college student pursues the sexy young wife of a classic elderly spouse, a carpenter who should have known he was too old to be able to keep her for himself. The student, Nicholas, who boards at the carpenter's house, convinces him that Noah's flood is about to recur, and to save themselves from drowning, all three of them must sleep one night in separate kneading tubs suspended from the rafters of the house's main room. Once the carpenter is snoring, Nicholas and the wife climb down to enjoy "the revel and the melodye . . . / In bisynesse of myrthe and of solas"³ (I. A.3652, 3654; the merrymaking and music of gaiety and pleasure) in the marital bed. Toward morning, a clerk, Absolon, who takes himself very seriously as a lover and has been avidly courting the wife, begs for a kiss at the bedroom window.

As Absolon chews spices to sweeten his breath in eager anticipation of the kiss, the wife sticks out her derriere and he, "ful savourly" (I.A.3735; with relish), kisses her hole. The wretched clerk, rubbing his lips "With dust, with sond, with straw, with clooth, with chippes" (I.A.3748; with dust, with sand, with straw, with cloth, with chips), and weeping "as dooth a child that is ybete" (I.A.3759; like a beaten child), borrows a red hot coulter from the village blacksmith, returns to the carpenter's bedroom window, and begs for another kiss. This time it is Nicholas who sticks out his rump, and Absolon, his aim perfected by Nicholas's fart, burns a hand's-width of skin off Nicholas's rear end. "Help! Water! Water!" cries Nicholas. The winding up of the second plot generates the finale of the first with such inexorableness that the predictability itself is half the fun. At the student's

² Chaucer's *Humor: Critical Essays*, ed. Jean E. Jost (New York & London: Garland Publishing, 1994).

³ Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Riverside Chaucer*, general ed. Larry D. Benson, 3rd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987). All citations of Chaucer will be to this edition.

cry, the old carpenter awakes, convinced Noah's flood has arrived. He cuts the rope that holds his kneading tub in the rafters and crashes to the floor to be ridiculed by the whole village for his daft idea that Noah's flood was about to recur.

Chaucer's *fabliau* plots are deliciously clever, but the double plot is only the start in "The Miller's Tale." Chaucer heaps comic moment on comic moment. Nicholas woos the wife, for instance, by catching her "by the queynte" (I.A.3276; by the crotch), all the time protesting that he is about to die of secret love for her:

And heeld hire harde by the haunchebones,
And seyde, "Lemman, love me al atones,
Or I wol dyen, also God me save!" (I.A.3279-81)

[And held her hard by the thighs, and said, "Sweetheart, love me right now or I will die, so help me God!"]

The crudity of the action set against Nicholas's attempt at elevated love language generates the fun. The comedy of Absolon's language depends on similar techniques. As he appeals to the wife for the first misplaced kiss, for instance, his lines are full of words involving eating. She is his "'hony-comb, sweete Alisoun,'" "'my sweete cynamome'" (I.A.3698-99; "honeycomb, sweet Alison," "my sweet cinnamon.") Wooing her at the bedroom window, he complains: "'Wel litel thynken ye upon my wo . . .'" (I.A.3701; "You're thinking very little about my unhappiness"). This is indeed the case since the wife is enjoying Nicholas in bed at this moment, but Absolon continues:

"That for youre love I swete ther I go.
No wonder is thogh that I swelte and swete;
I moorne as doth a lamb after the tete." (I.A.3702-04)

["that I sweat for your love where I walk. It's no wonder I feel faint and sweat; I yearn like a lamb for the teat."]

The courtly lover as a sweating lamb wanting to nurse mocks at once the unsophistication of a village lover's ideas about loving and the ridiculous behaviors implied by sophisticated love language.

The most ingeniously comic twist in Chaucer's "Miller's Tale," however, is the initial depiction of the young wife. Chaucer reworks in barnyard language the stock romance set-piece description of the heroine. Her body, he writes, is as gentle and small as a weasel's. Her apron is as white as newly milked milk. Her plucked eyebrows are as black as a sloe berry. She is more beautiful to look at than a pear tree in full bloom. She sings as eagerly and loudly as a swallow sitting on a barn, and on and on he goes for thirty-seven verses of this at once lovely and laughable tour de force. Sex, scatology, outrageous actions inspired by generic characters—the old husband, the sexy young wife, the predatory student

—Chaucer puts together this standard *fabliau* fare so superlatively that even high school students, reading “The Miller’s Tale” in translation, laugh out loud.

Fabliau material and themes are the core of Canterbury Tale after Canterbury Tale. “The Merchant’s Tale” yields an even more outrageous conclusion than “The Miller’s Tale.” An old knight, imagining himself a Paris of sexual prowess, purchases a young wife. Chaucer recounts their wedding night in excruciating detail including a list of the aphrodisiacs the knight imbibes, his kisses, his caresses of his wife’s face and neck “With thikke bristles of his berd unsofte, / Lyk to the skyn of houndfyssh, sharp as brere” (IV.E.1824–25; with the thick bristles of his rough beard, like the skin of a dogfish, sharp as a briar), his “labors” all night long, and his morning song when daylight arrives: “The slakke skyn aboute his nekke shaketh / Whil that he sang, so chaunteth he and craketh” (IV.E.1849–50; His slack neck skin shakes while he sang—as he sings and croaks). By the tale’s close, the wife is literally having sex with the knight’s squire in a pear tree while her now blind old husband embraces the tree trunk below. By magic, the knight regains his sight just at the moment when he can see that ““Ye, algate in it wente!” (IV.E.2376; “Yes, surely, it went in!”), but the wife defends herself with a double argument: her husband did not see what he thought he saw because his newly restored sight is still faulty; moreover, she was struggling with a man in a tree because she had been told that that was the way to restore her husband’s sight.

In another Canterbury Tale, “The Summoner’s Tale,” a friar tries to wheedle money, produce, or any other sort of gift from a poor, sick churl. After the friar swears to divide any gift the churl gives him with his fellow friars, the friar puts his hand down into the sick churl’s “cleft,” expecting a jewel of some sort. Instead, the churl matches the hot air of the friar’s sermonizing with his own gift, a fart worthy of a cart horse, and scatology layers on to scholastic hairsplitting as the story ends concentrating on the academic problem of how to divide a fart into twelve equal parts.⁴ Social satire, young wives purchased by old men, a corrupt clergy, gross sex acts, bodily functions served up Chaucerian style, and these are only a few of *The Canterbury Tales’ fabliaux*. It is *fabliaux* like these that have made Chaucer so famous as a comic writer.

The *Troilus and Criseyde* comedy, however, operates altogether differently. A typical *fabliau* is ca. 700 lines long; *Troilus and Criseyde* is over 8,000 lines long. Its society, characterizations, settings, and action are so extensive that early twentieth-century critics liked to call it the first novel.⁵ *Fabliau* comedy progresses in a steady,

⁴ Laura Kendrick elaborates the many twists and turns of this fart-in-the-face imagery. *Chaucerian Play: Comedy and Control in the Canterbury Tales* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 80–81.

⁵ Some of the more famous of these include E. De Sélincourt, G. L. Kittredge, R. K. Root, and J. I. Wimsatt. See Alice R. Kaminsky, *Chaucer’s Troilus and Criseyde and the Critics* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1980), 74–75, and 192–93, note 3.

half-predictable ascent to an outrageous climax. The comedy in *Troilus and Criseyde* instead interacts with and contributes to other developments and structures of meaning. Sometimes its impact is weak, present but not noticeably so; sometimes it is strong. It plays off with great subtlety against many complex structures of meaning and it contributes to larger interacting structures.

A love story that ends tragically, *Troilus and Criseyde* takes place during the Greeks' war against Troy. Troilus, son of King Priam of Troy, second only to his brother Hector as the greatest warrior of the Trojan forces, falls devastatingly in love at first sight with an exceedingly beautiful widow named Criseyde. Criseyde is the daughter of a soothsayer who foresaw the fall of Troy and deserted to the Greek camp, leaving his daughter behind. Most of the poem concerns the development of this couple's relationship. Ultimately, after many episodes, Criseyde returns Troilus's love, and the couple spends three years in an ecstatically passionate love affair. Their idyll is razed, however, when Criseyde's soothsayer father foresees doom approaching for the Trojans and Troy, and arranges to have Criseyde exchanged for a Trojan prisoner. She goes to live with her father in the Greek camp, and there she embarks on another love affair, this time with a Greek warrior. Troilus, broken-hearted, tries to kill Criseyde's Greek lover on the battlefield, but instead Troilus himself is killed by Achilles.

Troilus is a prince, but Criseyde is not far beneath him in social stature. Her home is referred to as a palace, it is richly appointed, and she is repeatedly introduced accompanied by an entourage of women. Although the poem never mentions its central figures' ages, critics speculate that they are quite young. Derek Brewer, for instance, judging from the ages at which English princes fought and married in the Middle Ages, writes that we should probably think of Troilus as fifteen or sixteen and Criseyde as "about the same age, or a little older."⁶

No one would expect a story with a tragic plot like this one to support much laughter, and no one would describe either Troilus or Criseyde as a comic character. Criseyde never makes a joke or behaves comically, although, unlike Troilus, she does respond to jokes. Troilus not only does not make jokes and is never shown responding to one, the single time he laughs in the poem is the least comical laugh in medieval English literature. As *Troilus and Criseyde* closes, Troilus has been killed by Achilles on the battlefield and his spirit ascends above the planets to the eighth sphere. From the heavens, Troilus looks down on earth at the people weeping hard over his death, and as he watches them, he laughs at their grief.⁷

⁶ Derek Brewer, "Troilus's 'Gentil' Manhood," *Masculinities in Chaucer: Approaches to Maleness in the Canterbury Tales and Troilus and Criseyde*, ed. Peter G. Beidler. Chaucer Studies, 25 (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1998), 237–52; here 240–41.

⁷ For a discussion of this laugh, its provenance, and its importance, see John M. Steadman,

As readers at the end of an immense poem about this hero, we are mourning his death, only to discover that the hero is laughing at us for responding like human beings. We are so pleasantly amused by *fabliau* situations because we identify with human failings and inadequacies. We all suffer the indignities of broken bones, burned flesh, and the demands of bodily functions. Greed, lust, even old lust, even old wishful-thinking-about-lust, are not entirely out of reach for us. They are not alien to the human condition. But Troilus's laugh is altogether alien.

The comedy in *Troilus and Criseyde* is entirely Chaucer's addition to the story he inherited. Giovanni Boccaccio's *Filostrato*, Chaucer's major source, is not comic at all. Comic characters are often part of a group of similar figures, like Shakespeare's Falstaff and the Boar's Head Tavern crew in *Henry the Fourth, Part I*, or Mistress Overdone and her co-workers and customers in *Measure for Measure*. Individual characters are rarely responsible for substantial amounts of comedy. But with neither Troilus nor Criseyde generating any humor, the comedy in *Troilus and Criseyde* is left to a single character. That character is Pandarus, Criseyde's uncle. Pandarus initiates all the comic dialogue and all the comic action in the poem.

As with the rest of the characters in *Troilus and Criseyde*, no age is explicitly attached to Pandarus, and Chaucerians disagree about this aspect of the character. Pandaro, in Boccaccio's *Filostrato*, is Criseyde's cousin. Some Chaucerians argue that Chaucer meant Pandarus to be older since he changed his source to make him Criseyde's uncle.⁸ Others say he must be close in age to Troilus and Criseyde since he is portrayed as Troilus's best friend. As Barry Windeatt points out, being Criseyde's uncle "may imply but does not confirm that he is in a different generation from Troilus."⁹

In English, a 'pander' is a pimp, 'to pander' means 'to pimp.' When Chaucer was writing *Troilus and Criseyde* in approximately 1385, however, Pandarus's name had no such meaning. It did not acquire this meaning until the fifteenth century, a good half-century later, and 'pander' meaning 'pimp' derived directly from Chaucer's character.¹⁰

Disembodied Laughter: Troilus and the Apotheosis Tradition: A Reexamination of Narrative and Thematic Contexts (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972).

⁸ Late nineteenth-century commentators generally saw Pandarus as considerably older than the lovers: "a battered middle-aged man of the world" (William M. Rossetti, 1875–1883); "an elderly gentleman with great experience of life" (Bernhard ten Brink, 1893), for example. Quoted in Thomas A. Kirby, *Chaucer's Troilus: A Study in Courtly Love* ([University, LA]: Louisiana State University Press, 1940), 177–79. But twenty-first-century commentators typically stress instead Pandarus's intimate friendship with Troilus.

⁹ Barry Windeatt, *Troilus and Criseyde*. Oxford Guides to Chaucer (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 290.

¹⁰ Gretchen Mieszkowski, *The Reputation of Criseyde: 1155–1500*. Transactions of the Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 43 (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1971), 129–31.

This single figure who generates all the comedy in this poem is unusual in another respect as well. The comedy he produces does not fit comedy's most usual patterns. Pandarus is the same social class as the couple; he is not a jester or professional jokester, or a parody of some other figure. The comedy associated with him is not at all like the comedy of the Miller's, Merchant's, or Summoner's tales. His joking is not class-based or scatological or straightforwardly sexual. Often a comic character is the spokesperson for a set of values that runs counter to the values of the principal characters. Falstaff, for instance, values life and limb so much more than honor that he plays dead on the battlefield at Shrewsbury. Sir Toby Belch's eat, drink, and be merry mantra in *Twelfth Night* is in raucous opposition to his niece's sedate mourning. But Pandarus in no way opposes the lovers' loving. On the contrary, he throws himself into fostering it and pushing it forward with such great enthusiasm that he undermines the values Troilus attaches to that loving. The usual impact of his comedy is to dislodge multiple levels of meaning that have already been attached to feelings and actions. Instead of presenting an opposed position, Pandarus and his comedy change the meaning of action from within.

The comedy of Pandarus's first appearance in *Troilus and Criseyde* is framed against the backdrop of Troilus's altogether different voice. Troilus, not comic at all, is tortured by intense, extreme, lyrical, radically idealized loving. He either fights so ferociously that the Greeks dread him like death itself or he lies in bed, unable to eat or sleep or think of anything but Criseyde, telling himself day after day, a thousand times an hour, that he will die unless she takes pity on him. But of course she has no idea he loves her. He has not made the slightest attempt to tell her anything about his feelings. Troilus is a traditional figure, a typical yearning lover from romance. French romance is full of great warriors similarly prostrated and silenced by love: Guillaume from *Guillaume de Palerne*, Alexander from Chrétien de Troyes' *Cligés*, and Lancelot in The Prose *Lancelot*, for instance. Moreover, Troilus's tormented idealized loving is presented honorably and compassionately. He explores his feelings through oxymoron after oxymoron, for instance, as he sings one of Petrarch's poems that begins:

"If no love is, O God, what fele I so?
And if love is, what thing and which is he?
If love be good, from whennes cometh my woo?
If it be wikke, a wonder thynketh me,
When every torment and adversite
That cometh of hym may to me savory thinke,
For ay thurst I, the more that ich it drynke." (1. 400–06)

[“If there is no such thing as love, oh God, what am I feeling so strongly? And if love exists, what sort of thing is it? If love is good, where does my misery come from? If it

is wicked, it seems a wonder to me that every torment and hardship that comes from it seems pleasant to me, for the more I drink, the thirstier I am.”]

Against Troilus’s lyricism is Pandarus’s comic voice: worldly, sensible, down-to-earth, speaking a language at the farthest remove from death-directed idealizing. He first appears when Troilus is lying in bed, waiting for death, devastated by his love of Criseyde but unwilling to give her any indication that he loves her. What makes Pandarus funny here is how tiresome he is. Overkill produces the comedy. He heaps up moment after moment, verse after verse until the reader is aghast at the sheer magnitude of it all. Pandarus lectures at Troilus virtually nonstop, pontificating pedantically for ninety-eight verses. This is no conversation; Pandarus is talking to a void. Troilus is virtually unresponsive. He is so unresponsive that at one point Pandarus “ful wonderlich and sharpe” (amazingly shrilly) cries out “Awake!” (1. 729)

Once Pandarus discovers that Troilus is in love, he lectures at him, relentlessly. As C. S. Lewis wrote, stressing that Pandarus does not intend to be comic, “Complacent instruction, when the instructor is willing and the pupil not, is always funny”¹¹ Pandarus is sententious:

“The wise seith, ‘Wo hym that is allone,
For, and he falle, he hath non helpe to ryse” (1. 694–95)

[“The wise man says, ‘Grief befalls the person who is alone because if he falls, he has no one to help him get up’”]

He is schoolmasterish:

“By his contrarie is every thyng declared.
“For how myghte evere swetnesse han ben knowe
To him that nevere tasted bitternesse?
Ne no man may ben inly glad, I trowe,
That nevere was in sorwe or som destresse.
Eke whit by blak, by shame ek worthinesse,
Ech set by other, more for other semeth,
As men may se, and so the wyse it demeth.

“Sith thus of two contraries is o lore” (1. 637–45)

[“Everything is defined by its contrary. For how could sweetness be known by a person who never tasted bitterness? Nor can any man be altogether happy, I believe, who has never felt sorrow or been in distress. And white beside black, shame beside worthiness, each set beside the other seems greater because of the other, as men can see, and so the wise judge it. Since thus one truth comes from two contraries”]

¹¹ C. S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition* (1936; London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 192.

He fills his stanzas with proverbs, adages, maxims, and old saws. Virtually every line in the above passage, for instance, is proverbial. Some of his proverbs are still well known, "Misery loves company," for instance: "Men seyn, 'to wrecche is consolacioun / To have another felawe in hys peyne'" (1. 708–09; "People say, 'it is a consolation for a miserable person to have a comrade share his pain.'") Others have disappeared: "A wheston is no kervyng instrument, / But yet it maketh sharppe kervyng tolis." (1. 631–32; "A whetstone is not a tool for cutting, but still it makes cutting tools sharp.") The comedy comes from their cumulative weight, proverb piled on proverb piled on proverb.

Examples, too, weigh down Pandarus's points, and he underscores their pedantry with little tags: "'as bokes telle,'" "'as techen us the wyse,'" "'so the wyse it demeth,'" "'as writen clerkes wise'" ("as books tell," "as the wise teach us," "so the wise judge," "as wise clerks write"). His tales of Oenone, Apollo, and Niobe drive Troilus to protest: "'What knowe I of the queene Nyobe? / Lat be thyne olde ensaumples, I the preye'" (1. 759–60; "What do I know about Queen Niobe? Lay off your old examples, I beg you.") But Pandarus is not to be stopped so easily. He adds in Tityus, "'Whos stomak foughles tiren evere moo / That hightyn volturis, as bokes telle'" (1. 787–88; "whose stomach birds tear at forever, birds called vultures, as books tell"). Troilus's love sickness has reduced him to such a state that he appears to be dying or going mad. Under the circumstances, it is sheer—and comic—pedantry of Pandarus to specify what kind of fowls were tearing at Tityus's liver, "'as bokes telle'" ("as books tell").

It is Pandarus who emerges in control from the collision of these two totally different ways of experiencing life. Pandarus reframes Troilus's loving as a manageable problem. Despite many stanzas of Pandarus's pleading, insistence, and promises to intervene with the lady, Troilus continues to refuse to tell him her name on the grounds that she would never have anything to do with a wretch like him. Pandarus then spells out the futility of weeping over a woman who has no idea he loves her. If Troilus dies of lovesickness, he tells him, she will think he died because he was afraid of the Greeks. For the first time, Troilus lets a practical perspective encroach upon his thoughts about loving. Troilus's totally unrealistic idealism, which before had seemed lyrical and romantic, sounds quite silly put in perspective by Pandarus's down-to-earth commonsense. His comic voice is redefining, or perhaps even undermining, romantic loving.

Loving as a problem to be solved is Pandarus's domain, and once Troilus tells him he loves Criseyde, Pandarus takes over. As Criseyde's uncle, Pandarus is greeted enthusiastically in her palace, and the scenes between them are lavishly developed with details of dress, dialogue, setting, and the behavior of others. She is a well-to-do widow, and he advises her on financial and legal matters. In his first visit with her as Troilus's emissary, he tells her that prince Troilus is dying of love for her, and after much conversation, she agrees to think of Troilus as a friend.

Pandarus's second visit is to get her to accept a love letter that he has coaxed Troilus into writing. Pandarus begins the visit with playful, clever, intimate, often self-deprecating jokes. One of his favorite subjects for jokes is his own ineffectiveness as a lover. When Criseyde greets him with inquiries as to how he is, he replies that he couldn't sleep this May morning: "'I have a joly wo, a lusty sorwe'" (2. 1099; "I have a merry woe, a delightful sorrow"). Romantic loving is characteristically described in oxymorons, but not these oxymorons. No elegant lover's "woe" could ever be "merry," or his sorrow "delightful." Criseyde continues the joke, inviting her uncle to tell them about his "joly wo": "'How ferforth be ye put in loves daunce?'" (2. 1106; "How are you making out in the dance of love?") Medieval dancing was line dancing, and Pandarus replies: "'By God . . . I hoppe alwey byhynde!'" (2.1107; "By God, I always hop at the back!"). Criseyde laughs as if her heart would break.¹²

Pandarus hopping along behind everyone else at the end of the line of love dancers is funny enough to justify her response, but there could also be a sexual under-meaning to his reply, as there often is to Pandarus's joking. Lovers—Troilus, for instance—are traditionally supposed to be so overcome by their feelings that they cannot eat. When Criseyde invites Pandarus to dine, he offers up more of his jokes about himself as a lover. "'Nece, I have so gret a pyne / For love, that everich other day I faste . . .'" (2. 1165–66; "Niece, love pains me so much that I fast every other day"). No romantic lover ever fasted on alternate days. This time, Criseyde laughs so hard that she thinks she's going to die. Pandarus's response to Troilus's love-sickness was sensible and realistic, but these jokes go far beyond sensible realism. These are the jokes of someone distanced enough from romantic loving that it looks ridiculous to him.

Pandarus's actual delivering of Troilus's letter is comedy of another kind. Criseyde reacts with dignified indignation when Pandarus offers her the letter. He should have more respect for her rank and social status than to give her such a thing, she says, at which point he takes hold of her, shoves the letter between her breasts, and dares her to throw it away for everyone to see. Pandarus's jokes about his lack of success as a lover are playfully intimate. Although socially acceptable, they are the sort of joke a discreet man would only make with a woman he knows well. This letter-thrusting is a different level of joke, so intimate that the reader is shocked for a moment. Moreover, it is an even more intimate action than twenty-first-century readers might realize. Throughout the poem, Criseyde wears widow's weeds. According to Laura Hodges, a historian of fourteenth-century literary

¹² As Alfred David points out, Troilus does not understand Pandarus's form of humor at all, "but it comes naturally to Criseyde." "Chaucerian Comedy and Criseyde," in *Essays on Troilus and Criseyde*, ed. Mary Salu. Chaucer Studies, 3 (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, Rowman & Littlefield, 1979), 90–104; here 91.

costume, Criseyde's widow's weeds would have included two veils and a barbe, the headdress that identified upper-class widows.¹³ The barbe wound around the head, covering everything but the face and extending down over the bosom. Fourteenth-century dresses had low necklines, but Pandarus would have had to have lifted Criseyde's barbe to shove the letter down her dress. A fourteenth-century reader would have realized just how intimate an action this had to be.¹⁴

Delivering Troilus's letter as he does, Pandarus succeeds in evading Criseyde's standoffishness. His action is comical, but it is also a direct assault on her ability to make decisions for herself and establish her own values and boundaries. Ultimately, it is an assault on her independence. His indecorousness cuts through her decorum. Pandarus will reenact this usurping of Criseyde's choices twice more in new forms as the poem progresses. Each time there will be a comic dimension to his intrusion, but, as here, the comedy will not be strong enough to leave the reader ready to accept complacently what he is doing.

Complex *fabliau* plots like the "Miller's Tale's" plot are funny simply by virtue of their complexity. In his machinations to deliver Criseyde to Troilus, Pandarus concocts and directs two plots with comic impacts like the impacts of complex *fabliau* plots. One of these plots is so complicated that audiences encountering it for the first time usually cannot follow it, in particular because they cannot tell the lies from the truths. It involves lies to relatives, pretending to be sick, characters maneuvered from one place to another, and the woman brought to the man under false pretenses. The second plot is less complex but more *fabliau*-like. The woman is sleeping in a room with a trap door in it when two men enter through the trap door. As Richard Green points out, "The scene in which Troilus is finally brought to his mistress' bed is one of sustained comic invention; in the solidity of its physical setting and in the string of misadventures which threaten to rob the action of its natural consummation, it reminds one more of a *fabliau* than an 'old romaunce.'"¹⁵ These are comic plots, not romance plots.¹⁶

The first and more complicated of these plots is to arrange the first meeting between Troilus and Criseyde. Criseyde protests that it is too soon for her to speak with Troilus when Pandarus first suggests they meet. She explains that she intends to love him undetected and reward him only with seeing her (2. 1291–95). In response, Pandarus swings into action, concocting lies of startling proportions. At their core is the idea that a man named Poliphete is threatening Criseyde's assets

¹³ Laura F. Hodges, "Sartorial Signs in *Troilus and Criseyde*," *The Chaucer Review* 35.3 (2001): 223–59; here 225–27.

¹⁴ Hodges, "Sartorial Signs," 231.

¹⁵ Richard F. Green, "*Troilus* and the Game of Love," *Chaucer Review* 13 (1979): 201–20; here 215.

¹⁶ About the comedy in Pandarus's plotting, C. David Benson, *Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990), writes: "... the wit and energy of Pandarus' endless schemes ... are as delightful as they are shameless," 142.

and she must be defended by powerful Trojans, but none of this is true. There is no law suit and no threats from Poliphete. Pandarus sends Troilus to Deiphebus, his favorite brother, instructing Troilus to fall sick and be put to bed. Pandarus then convinces Deiphebus that, to protect Criseyde, he needs to invite Criseyde and a group of important Trojans to a meal where Pandarus can present Criseyde's side of the lawsuit and ask for their help.

After the group has eaten and heard Criseyde's case, Pandarus suggests that she and he go to Troilus's sickroom so that she can ask Troilus for support in person. Helen and Deiphebus are already with Troilus, Pandarus announces for the assembled company, although the two in fact have been maneuvered out into a garden where they will stay until after the meeting between Criseyde and Troilus. The sole purpose of all this plotting is to bring Troilus and Criseyde together without Criseyde's consent. They meet for the first time in a bedroom, chaperoned only by Pandarus, with Criseyde believing that she needs help with a law suit and is in danger of losing much of her wealth.

Troilus, knowing he is part of a hoax, is so distraught and ashamed when Criseyde tries to thank him for his protection of her and asks him for continued support that he forgets everything he intended to say and, alternately blushing and paling, his voice shaking, the first words that escape him are "'Mercy, mercy, swete herte!'" (3. 98; "Mercy, mercy, sweetheart!") His appeal to Criseyde is exquisitely elevated and heartfelt. Even this moment in this scene, however, is precariously balanced between comedy and seriousness. C. David Benson writes: "It is difficult not to laugh at Troilus as he lies stunned, blushing and tongue-tied before his beloved . . ." ¹⁷ Criseyde's reply to him is only slightly less lyrical and ends with her promise to turn all his bitterness into sweetness. The basis of this meeting, Pandarus's contribution, remains duplicity and comic intrigue.

As Criseyde promises that if she is the one who can make Troilus happy, he will recover a bliss for every woe, and then takes him in her arms and kisses him, Pandarus falls to his knees, throws his eyes up to heaven, holds up his hands in prayer praising Cupid and Venus, and finally claims a miracle honoring the occasion: "'Withouten hond, me semeth that in the towne, / For this merveille ich here ech belle sowne'" (3. 188–89; "To celebrate this miracle, it seems to me that I hear every bell in this town ringing with no one ringing them.") Is Pandarus clowning, or are we supposed to take him seriously? ¹⁸ Unresolvable issues about

¹⁷ Benson, *Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde*, 142.

¹⁸ C. S. Lewis, writing seventy-five years ago, was convinced that "If Pandarus is consciously playing a part at this moment, he is a buffoon of the most odious sort," but Lewis's only defense of his position was that "the thing is far more delicate—the comedy more subtle—than the modern reader expects it to be." *The Allegory*, 191.

his tone arise more strongly as he invites Troilus and Criseyde to meet at his house:

“And eseth there youre hertes right ynough;
And lat se which of yow shal bere the belle
To speke of love aright!” —therwith he lough—
“For ther have ye a leiser for to telle.” (3. 197–200)

[“and ease your hearts sufficiently there: and let’s see which of you will win the prize for speaking most correctly about love” —he laughed at that— “for there you will have opportunity to talk.”]

What sort of laugh is this? A smirk? A leer? An appreciative guffaw? And what is Pandarus suggesting about this competition between speakers and where their speech might lead, given their leisure together, safe at his house? How fast and far along he has moved Criseyde from her resolve not to speak with Troilus!

The most extraordinary episode in *Troilus and Criseyde* is the night of the consummation of their relationship. Chaucer’s portrayal of that first night of love extends through four hundred twenty-eight verses, even limiting the total to the lovers’ actual time in bed together. This is a radical break with romance tradition. Medieval love stories typically restrict depiction of the couple’s loving to a few brief, allusive remarks. In Chrétien de Troyes’ *The Knight of the Cart* (*Lancelot*) (ca. 1174–81), for instance, the reader hears about Lancelot’s heroic breaking of the iron bars at Guinevere’s bedroom window and his genuflecting at the foot of her bed, but the description of their kisses and joy making love only occupies eleven verses.¹⁹ Tristan and Isolde, in Gottfried von Strassburg’s *Tristan* (ca. 1210), consummate their love in many varied episodes, but Gottfried either takes cover behind allegories to acknowledge their lovemaking or mentions ecstasy and fulfilled yearnings in passing.²⁰ When Marie de France’s couples make love in her *Lais* (ca. 1160–1170), all the reader learns is that they lie together and laugh and sport.²¹

Chaucer’s portrayal of Troilus and Criseyde’s first night of love is a heroic tour de force of combining sensuousness and nobility. Compared with traditional depictions of loving in medieval romance, this loving is spectacularly carnal. Nowhere in the poetry of Marie de France, Chrétien de Troyes, or Gottfried von

¹⁹ Chrétien de Troyes, *Lancelot or The Knight of the Cart* (*Le Chevalier de la Charrete*), ed. and trans. William W. Kibler, Garland Library of Medieval Literature, Series A, 1 (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1984), lines 4669–79.

²⁰ For example, Gottfried von Strassburg, *Tristan with the ‘Tristan’ of Thomas*, trans. A. T. Hatto (London: Penguin Books, 1960; reissued 2004), 201–02.

²¹ For example, “Yonec,” lines 191–94. Marie de France, *The Lais of Marie de France*, trans. Glyn S. Burgess, Keith Busby, 2nd ed. (1999; London: Penguin Books, 2003).

Strassburg is there a stanza describing the naked heroine in bed with her lover to compare to this one:

Hire armes smale, hire streghte bak and softe,
 Hire sydes longe, fleshly, smothe, and white
 He gan to stroke, and good thrift bad ful ofte
 Hire snowissh throte, hire brestes rounde and lite.
 Thus in this hevene he gan hym to delite,
 And therwithal a thousand tyme hire kiste,
 That what to don, for joie unnethe he wiste. (3. 1247–53)

[He began to stroke her small arms, her straight, soft back, her long sides, shapely, smooth, and white, and he very often called down blessings on her snowy throat and her round, light breasts. Thus he began to delight himself in this heaven, and he kissed her a thousand times to the point that he was so full of joy, he scarcely knew what to do.]

Criseyde, naked, is described at once precisely, sensually, and reverently. Within explicit relishing of the carnality of these two, Chaucer spiritualizes their night of love.

What is most remarkable is how purposefully Chaucer renders the carnal spiritual in this episode. Through Troilus's repeated attribution of his success in loving to the gods, through the extreme claims the lovers make about their feelings for each other, through the extravagant stances Troilus, in particular, adopts as lover, and through the lyrical pastoral and natural imagery that describes the two together, Chaucer elevates Troilus and Criseyde's loving to the quintessentially romantic.

When Troilus realizes that he is about to be in a situation where he can become Criseyde's lover, he appeals for help to the gods—not to one or two pagan gods, but to seven: to Venus because of her love of Adonis, to Jove because of his love of Europa, to Mars because of his love of Venus, to Phebus Apollo because of his love of Daphne, and finally to the three fates (3. 712–35). As the night of love progresses, Troilus prays again twice. When he first takes Criseyde in his arms, he gives thanks to the seven planets (3. 1203), and as he kisses and caresses her in bed, he praises Cupid, Hymen, and Venus. This time his appeals are rich in overtly religious implications: "'O Love, O Charite! / Thi moder ek, Citheria the swete, / After thiself next heried be she . . .'" (3. 1254–56; "Oh Love, oh Charity! Also your mother, sweet Cytherea, may she be praised after yourself . . ."). The Christian God too is a god of love, as any Christian reader would be remembering at this point. Troilus then hymns his debt to Hymen, "Imeneus," god of marriage, one of the Church's sacraments, and when Troilus adds in "'Benigne Love, thow holy bond of thynges'" ("Gracious Love, you holy bond of things"), without whose grace desire flies without wings (3. 1261–63), the reader is taken back to Chaucer's great Boethian prologue to Book Three which praises love's saving capacity to

unite all the disparate parts of creation in one whole—man, bird, beast, fish, herb, and green tree:

God loveth, and to love wol nought werne,
And in this world no lyves creature
Withouten love is worth, or may endure. (3. 12–14)

[God loves, and will not deny anything to love, and in this world, no living creature is of any value or can endure without love.]

Troilus is overcome by his own unworthiness; he cannot deserve Criseyde's love; he can only depend on Love's grace to rescue him. He would lose everything "'But if thi (Love's) grace passed oure desertes'" (3. 1267; "unless thy [Love's] grace surpassed our merits"). And the Christian reader hears the sinner's unworthiness and Christian grace.

Criseyde and Troilus both make extravagant claims that elevate the stature of this love of theirs, and the narrator describes it equally extravagantly. In each other's arms, they float out of woe into bliss greater than any they have felt since they were born (3. 1221–22). Once Criseyde is convinced of Troilus's sincerity and trustworthiness, all her fears and troubles melt away (3. 1226–27). Their joy is so great that their worst dread is that they are asleep and dreaming (3. 1341–44). As dawn breaks and Troilus must leave, Criseyde complains against the shortness of their night together in an aubade, protesting: why couldn't this night be as long as the night Jove tripled to make love to Alcmena? (3. 1427–28).

Criseyde's love language elevates their love, but the most extreme and most spiritualizing claims come from Troilus himself. His repeated extravagant evocations of her impact on him and his life lift their loving to the poem's greatest romantic heights. Some of these are the usual protestations of the lovers of romance. He is altogether unworthy of her (3. 1284). She must teach him to deserve her thanks. He will never do anything she does not want him to do, and if he does, she should kill him (3. 1293–302). Her eyes, that he kisses again and again, bind him to her without bonds (3. 1352–58). When Criseyde first forgets her fear and talks to him about love, he feels like someone who has seen his death, believes he is about to die, and is suddenly rescued (3. 1240–43). God has created him to serve her; to have her as his steersman; to have him live or die as she pleases (3. 1291–92). With her in his arms, he sighs a thousand times (3. 1360), and when dawn comes, he strains her against him, weeping, declaring his heart is breaking, and railing against the cruelty of envious day that spies on them (3. 1440–75). She is the root of his happiness or woe, the source from which they spring (3. 1473). How can he preserve his life for an hour away from her since all the life he has is with her? How can he live without her? (3. 1475)

Troilus and Criseyde takes place in a city and in the camp of a besieging army. Lyrical nature imagery comes as a surprise in a poem that has so little to do with

the natural world. Nevertheless Chaucer floods the beginning of this love scene with natural imagery, and like the fervent excesses of both lovers, it elevates them and their loving. As Troilus embraces Criseyde, she trembles like an aspen leaf (3. 1200), and the narrator asks, "What myghte or may the sely larke seye, / Whan that the sperhawk hath it in his foot?" (3. 1191–92; What can the innocent lark say when the sparrow hawk has her in his foot?) The lovers entwining themselves in each other's arms are described in a luscious image of springtime and mutuality: "And as aboute a tree, with many a twiste, / Bytrent and writh the swote wodebynde, / Gan ech of hem in armes other wynde" (3. 1230–2; And as the many tendrils of the sweet honeysuckle encircle and wreath it around a tree, each of them began to wind the other one in their arms.) When Criseyde's confidence rises, she opens her heart to Troilus

... as the newe abaysed nyghtyngale,
 That stynteth first whan she bygynneth to synge,
 Whan that she hereth any herde tale,
 Or in the hegges any wyght stiryng,
 And after siker doth hire vois out ryng . . . (3. 1233–37)

[like the suddenly startled nightingale that, when she first begins to sing, stops if she hears any shepherd talk, or any person stirring in the hedges, and afterwards her voice rings out securely . . .]

One of the most interesting of these images, Criseyde's magnificent vow of fidelity to Troilus, inverts natural occurrences. Troilus, forced to leave Criseyde at dawn, laments that if he knew truly that he was fixed in her heart as firmly as she is in his, he could better endure his pain. In response, she swears:

"... first shal Phebus fallen fro his speere,
 And everich egle ben the dowves feere,
 And everich roche out of his place sterte,
 Er Troilus oute of Criseydes herte." (3.1495–98)

["... first shall Phebus fall out of his sphere, and every eagle mate with the dove, and every rock fall out of its place, before Troilus falls out of Criseyde's heart."]

Richly as nature imagery and the lovers' dialogue elevate and intensify this ecstatic first night of love in *Troilus and Criseyde*, Chaucer uses a rarer technique to heighten it even more. He crafts his narrator as an unloved lover who yearns for love but has never loved, and he then projects the narrator's audience as experienced, successful lovers. The lovers' joy becomes that much more valuable framed by the narrator's yearning. For instance, when Criseyde accepts Troilus, "Welcome, my knyght, my pees, my suffisaunce!" (3. 1309; "Welcome my knight, my peace, my fulfillment"), the narrator breaks in to say that the very least of their delights or joys would be beyond his grasp. He then appeals to the audience: "But juggeth ye that han ben at the feste / Of swich gladnesse, if that hem liste pleye!"

(3. 1312–13; But judge, you who have been at the feast of such joy, whether it pleases them to make love!") And finally, exclaiming over how joyful that blissful night was for those two, this yearning narrator, desperate for love, says, "Why nad I swich oon with my soule ybought, / Ye, or the leeste joie that was there?" (3. 1319–20; Why hadn't I bought such a night with my soul, yes, or the smallest joy of such a night?). At the price of the narrator's soul! That, then, becomes the worth of this loving. Chaucer had used this technique of the unloved lover earlier in *The Parliament of Fowls*, but never so movingly.

No one can disagree that this is a cameo of a love scene, the ecstatic union of two noble, passionate young lovers in each other's arms for the first time. C. S. Lewis describes it as "some of the greatest erotic poetry of the world."²² This cameo, however, is diabolically set. Where is the comedy in this scene? Introducing it; scattered within it; surrounding it. Where is Pandarus all this time? Everywhere. Criseyde's uncle has no exit line.

This night of love is compromised from its very beginning. Chaucer's *fabliau* comedy runs as an undercurrent beneath it, emerging and submerging, again and again. It is on the basis of this night that 'Pandarus' comes to mean 'pimp,' 'procurer' in the fifteenth century. He procures his niece for Troilus. On the evening of the consummation, Pandarus invites Criseyde to his home for dinner, assuring her that Troilus is out of town. She arrives with a noblewoman's entourage of attendant ladies. During the dinner, when a terrific storm begins, Pandarus convinces Criseyde to spend the night. She goes to bed in a little inner bedroom with her ladies-in-waiting sleeping in the next room, just beyond her own open door, and Pandarus explains that he will sleep in the following room to guard her ladies. Meanwhile Pandarus has hidden Troilus in a closet linked to the little bedroom by a passageway and a trapdoor.

Voice against voice; attitude against attitude; action against action—the clash begins here. As Troilus and Criseyde play their parts in this great love scene, the presence of Pandarus deflates their ideals, undercuts their tender moments, reduces the elevation of their union, and, in short, pulls romantic love back down to earth with a thud and a leer. Like a basso continuo beneath a lyric soprano aria, Pandarus's actions and lines channel the reader's skepticism about attaching elevated meanings to desire. It is a huge understatement when C. David Benson writes, "Great love-poetry does not usually also try to make us laugh . . ." ²³

Troilus is approaching this night of love that Pandarus has set up for him with etherealizing awe. Pandarus's ideas about this night of love are so bizarrely different from Troilus's that the reader laughs at the jolting contrast. When

²² Lewis, *Allegory*, 196. Lewis protects his point of view by virtually ignoring Pandarus's role in this scene.

²³ Benson, *Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde*, 148, note 7.

Pandarus tells Troilus that he is about to experience heaven's bliss, and Troilus responds by appealing to seven gods for help, Pandarus promises:

"So thryve I, this nyght shal I make it weel,
Or casten al the gruwel in the fire." (3. 710–11)

["As I hope to thrive, I'll make everything good tonight, or throw all the porridge in the fire."]

Pandarus's altogether colloquial "or throw all the porridge in the fire" matches Troilus's "'Now, blisful Venus, thow me grace sende!'" (3. 705; Now blessed Venus, send me grace!") After twenty-one more verses of Troilus's prayer, as he launches his appeal to the three fates, Pandarus erupts:

. . . "Thow wrecched mouses herte,
Artow agast so that she wol the bite?" (3. 736–37)

[. . . "You wretched mouse's heart, are you afraid she's going to bite you?"]

Does Pandarus and Pandarus's comedy destabilize Troilus's valuing of love? Surely this is the central issue raised by the comedy in *Troilus and Criseyde*.

Criseyde is not raped.²⁴ Three hundred eighty-five verses intervene between her first realization that Pandarus is in her bedroom and her acceptance of Troilus as a lover. Nevertheless, this scene Pandarus engineers is unnervingly like a classic set-up for a rape where the man awakens the sleeping woman in the middle of the night.²⁵ Like Pandarus's implied notions about desire that conflict so strongly with Troilus's, this all too apparent rape-scene likeness and the pack of lies that deceive Criseyde hover over the loving that follows.

Pandarus leads Troilus through the trapdoor into Criseyde's bedroom, but Criseyde, even when she realizes Pandarus is there, does not know that Troilus is with him. Troilus stands behind her bed curtains while Pandarus, within them, besieges Criseyde with lies that are an even more direct attack on her than the Poliphete lies that propelled her to Troilus's bedroom at Deiphebus's. This time Pandarus claims that Troilus is out of his mind with jealousy and Criseyde must see him that night to save his life. After an immense amount of persuasion and

²⁴ Christopher Cannon considers this question in terms of medieval English law: "Chaucer and Rape: Uncertainty's Certainties," *Representing Rape in Medieval and Early Modern Literature*, ed. Elizabeth Robertson, Christine M. Rose, The New Middle Ages (New York and Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 255–79; here 268–70. Louise O. Fradenburg analyzes the violence in Criseyde's situation in "'Our owen wo to drynke': Loss, Gender and Chivalry in *Troilus and Criseyde*," *Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde "Subgit to alle Poesye": Essays in Criticism*, ed. R. A. Shoaf (Binghamton, NY: Pegasus Press, 1992), 88–106; here 98–103.

²⁵ For a discussion of such rapes, see Gretchen Mieszkowski, *Medieval Go-betweens and Chaucer's Pandarus*, The New Middle Ages (New York and Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 41–44.

pressuring of Criseyde, Pandarus finally maneuvers Troilus to her bedside where he kneels beside her bed. In response to her confusion and embarrassment at the sight of Troilus, Pandarus starts clowning, much as he had when the lovers kissed at Deiphebus's. Pandarus tells Criseyde to look at how this lord can kneel, and then runs for a cushion for the kneeling Troilus.

. . . "Kneleth now, while that yow leeste;
There God youre hertes brynge soone at reste!" (3. 965–66)

["Kneel now while you please; may God soon bring your hearts peace there!"]

This last verse sounds vaguely suggestive. As Criseyde, after sighs, invites Troilus, still kneeling, to sit down, Pandarus fusses around them, maneuvering them more together and increasing his degree of suggestiveness:

. . . "Now wol y wel bigynne.
Now doth hym sitte, goode nece deere,
Upon youre beddes syde al ther withinne,
That ech of yow the bet may other heere." (3. 974–77)

["Now you are beginning well. Now, good dear niece, have him sit on the side of your bed, all there inside, so that each of you can hear the other better."]

"Al ther withinne" has to do with Criseyde's bed curtains, but Pandarus's last line, worrying about their being able to hear each other, is progressing toward a knowing grin.

Pressured by Pandarus through hundreds of verses about Troilus's nearly fatal jealousy, Criseyde proceeds to lecture Troilus against the evils of jealousy, scolding him for his faithlessness while assuring him of her own fidelity. Finally she begins to cry. The case against Criseyde is nothing but lies, and by association Troilus is guilty of those lies. He is overcome by self-reproach at the sight of his lady's tears, and he faints. Pandarus's project from the start has been getting Troilus and Criseyde in bed together. This outcome is looking more and more unlikely; the means to effecting it is making it impossible: the woman is weeping, she has lain down in bed and pulled the sheet over her head, and the man, once again on his knees beside the bed, has fainted.

Troilus's faint triggers the most overt, outrageously comic action of the poem. Pandarus literally picks up the unconscious Troilus, throws him into Criseyde's bed, and "of he rente al to his bare sherte . . ." (3. 1099; tore everything off him down to his bare shirt). This action is undeniably, even bizarrely comic. It stands in total contrast to the lyrical, etherealized scene between the lovers, and yet without it that archetypal night of romantic love could not have occurred.

Moreover, as the loving proceeds—and it is hard to imagine that it could proceed at all from such a beginning—the reader is not allowed to forget both that this is a threesome, and that while the voices of the lovers are usually ecstatic and elevated, this third voice is alien, ordinarily comic, and even slyly sexually

suggestive. Pandarus is reintroduced three times, each time jolting the reader out of complacent pleasure in romantic loving. Where does Pandarus spend that night? That issue is first raised as he maneuvers Troilus within Criseyde's bed curtains, at which point we are told Pandarus withdraws toward the fire: "And took a light, and fond his contenance, / As for to looke upon an old romaunce" (3. 979–80; And took a candle and assumed an attitude as if he were looking at an old romance). But what is this old romance? Is it a book Pandarus is assuming the appearance of reading? Or is it Troilus and Criseyde in each other's arms? Pandarus, the third party who potentially watches the lovers, triggers issues not only about dirty uncles who like to watch their nieces having sex, but also about the legitimacy of the readers' pleasures in a love story like this one. If his voyeuristic pleasures are illegitimate, what about our own?

After Pandarus's announced retreat to the fireplace, he shows up next in the incipient love scene to salvage the situation when Troilus faints. Once Pandarus throws Troilus into Criseyde's bed and advises her to tell him she forgives him, alongside Criseyde, Pandarus rubs Troilus's palms and wets his brow to bring him back to consciousness. It takes Criseyde and Pandarus both to rouse Troilus from his faint. Is this a comic scene or a romantic scene? Elements of it are far more serious than twenty-first-century readers would initially recognize. Fainting was believed to be life-threatening in the Middle Ages²⁶ and Troilus is described as on the verge of death. Fainting is also a traditional expression in medieval literature of how much in love lovers are, male and female alike.²⁷ Richard Zeikowitz adds another dimension to these complications. Zeikowitz sees Pandarus's involvement with this couple as homoerotic and heterosexual at once, with desire of one form slipping into desire of the other as the situation changes. Just as Pandarus possesses Criseyde vicariously when Troilus does, "By literally throwing Troilus into bed and stripping him to his bare shirt, Pandarus appears ready to rape Troilus," Zeikowitz writes. And when Pandarus and Criseyde are working together to recover the unconscious Troilus, elements of both forms of desire are in play.²⁸ These are the serious aspects of this scene.

However, at the same time, when Pandarus throws Troilus into the bed, his action is comic. It is also comic to imagine this naked woman and her uncle ministering to this would-be lover. Moreover, despite the fact that fainting in medieval literature is a sign of elevated romantic feelings, commonsense says that

²⁶ Elizabeth Liggins, "The Lovers' Swoons in *Troilus and Criseyde*," *Parergon* 3.3 (1985): 93–106; here 96, 99–100.

²⁷ Gretchen Mieszkowski, "Revisiting Troilus's Faint," *Men and Masculinities in Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde*, ed. Tison Pugh and Marcia Smith Marzec, *Chaucer Studies*, 38 (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2008), 43–57; here 49–52.

²⁸ Richard E. Zeikowitz, *Homoeroticism and Chivalry: Discourses of Male Same-Sex Desire in the 14th Century*. The New Middle Ages (New York and Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 57–60.

an unconscious man cannot be an effective lover. This is the aspect of the matter glimpsed in both Pandarus's and Criseyde's objections. Pandarus protests, "'O thef, is this a mannes herte?'" (3. 1098; "O thief, is this a man's heart?"). And Criseyde seconds him: "'Is this a mannes game? / What, Troilus, wol ye do thus for shame?'" (3.1126–27; "Is this any way for a man to act? Troilus, are you doing this to shame yourself?").

Bringing back into play the high romance element of the astonishing mixture in this scene, Criseyde takes Troilus in her arms, forgives him, and kisses him repeatedly. The reader, however, is not allowed to relax into enjoyment of this long awaited result. Instead, Pandarus introduces his second exit line and another arch smile at the lovers:

... "For aught I kan asprien,
This light, nor I, ne serven here of nought.
Light is nought good for sike folkes yën!" (3. 1135–37)

["As far as I can see, neither this light, nor I, is of any use here. Light isn't good for sick people's eyes!"]

This time, we expect him to leave this bedroom and its lovers, but he does not. He carries the candle to the fireplace. Moreover, several stanzas into the love scene, after Troilus has begged Criseyde's forgiveness and is finally embracing her tightly, and we're verging on the hapless-lark/sparrow-hawk image, the narrator re-introduces Pandarus who is lying down to sleep. Pandarus says, "'If ye be wise, / Swouneth nought now, lest more folk arise!'" (3. 1189–90; "If you're wise, don't faint now, for fear more people will get up!") But where is he lying down to sleep? By the fireplace? We are never told. Even more than the first meeting of the lovers at Deiphebus's house, this first night of love epitomizes the insistent doubleness of the presentation of love in this poem, alternately spiritualized and undercut again and again.

At some time, Pandarus must have left that bedroom because he reenters it the next morning. Criseyde is still in that bed that Troilus has just vacated. The stanzas that recount her interaction with Pandarus the morning after her first night with Troilus are some of the most ambiguous stanzas in *Troilus and Criseyde*. Even in a very generous reading, they bookmark the great love scene with the sly joking about sex that underlies so many of Pandarus's remarks. Less conservatively read, they describe Pandarus committing incest with Criseyde.

Pandarus greets Criseyde with:

... "Al this nyght so reyned it, allas,
That al my drede is that ye, nece swete,
Han litel laiser had to slepe and mete.
Al nyght," quod he, "hath reyn so do me wake,
That som of us, I trowe, hire hedes ake." (3.1557–61)

[“Alas, it rained so hard all night long that all my fear is that you, sweet niece, had little chance to sleep and dream. All night,” he said, “the rain kept me so wide awake that some of us, I believe, have headaches.”]

Sly, arch, knowing; a moderately discreet form of: “I know what you’ve been doing.” “And ner he com . . .” (3.1562; And he came nearer . . .), the narrator continues. But we do not want to be hearing this. We do not want to know how near Pandarus comes at this moment. He next asks Criseyde how she’s doing this merry morning and she replies so colloquially that she sounds like him:

“Nevere the bet for yow,
Fox that ye ben! God yeve youre herte kare!” (3.1564–65)

[“Never any better on your account, fox that you are! God give your heart grief!”]

From this point on, the implications start coming faster and faster. Blushing for shame, Criseyde hides her face underneath the bedsheet, and Pandarus “gan under for to prie” (3.1571; began to peer under). Remember, Criseyde is naked. Pandarus continues:

. . . “Nece, if that I shal be ded,
Have here a swerd and smyteth of myn hed!” (3.1572–73)

[“Niece, if I shall die, here, take a sword and cut off my head!”]

No one can figure out a probable piece of action to match these lines. Swords are large and heavy, and Pandarus is peering under a sheet at this time. Many Chaucerians on the other hand point out how phallic a sword is.

With that his arm al sodeynly he thriste
Under hire nekke, and at the laste hire kyste. (3.1574–75)

[With that, very suddenly he thrust his arm under her neck, and finally kissed her.]

Compared to the intimacy of this action at this point—both the thrusting and the kissing— shoving Troilus’s letter down the front of Criseyde’s dress was child’s play. The end of the verse, however, tops the beginning: “At the laste”? After what? The following verse, “I passe al that which chargeth nought to seye” (3.1576; I pass over everything that is not worth mentioning), is another exceedingly unfortunate suggestion, given the context. Just what is it that is being omitted? The narrator next says that Criseyde forgave Pandarus, “and with here uncle gan to pleye” (3.1578; and began to play with her uncle) which adds more questionable overtones since “pleye” is often a sex word for Chaucer. The narrator concludes the stanza diabolically: “And Pandarus hath fully his entente” (3.1582; and Pandarus has fulfilled his intention completely).

There is no agreement among Chaucerians about these four stanzas of double-entendres and questionable actions. Stephen A. Barney, for instance, editor of

Troilus and Criseyde for the *Riverside Chaucer*, wrote in 1987 that reading these stanzas as describing Pandarus seducing or raping Criseyde is “baseless and absurd,” that Chaucer never hinted at anything of the sort.²⁹ Most Chaucerians, nevertheless, struggle with how improbably suggestive this poetry persists in being.³⁰ Line after line carries possible sexual meanings that violate outrageously the atmosphere of the love scene that precedes this one.

The *fabliaux* are comic from start to finish. In *Troilus and Criseyde*, instead, comedy is an interloper. Nevertheless, it is a crucial interloper. It makes possible the astonishing interplay between high romance and *fabliau* action and attitudes that typifies *Troilus and Criseyde*. The comedy in *Troilus and Criseyde* refuses to allow the poem’s apparent meaning as a paean to romantic love to triumph. Love is quintessentially valued by imagery, rhetoric, contrasting voice, and the lovers’ claims, and then, at the same time, it is repeatedly compromised by means of the comedy. The great consummation episode of Book Three, surely the core of *Troilus and Criseyde*, is set up like a *fabliau* rape episode in which the woman is surprised in bed by two men in the middle of the night; the hours of intimacy begin with the lover, unconscious, thrown into the lady’s bed³¹; reminders of the presence of an amused observer intersperse the descriptions of loving; and finally this dimension of the poem—Pandarus’s dimension—culminates in the morning-after coda between Pandarus and Criseyde with its potentially devastating double meanings capable of undercutting every romance element that has gone before.³²

This is laughter at work, but not as it is in the *fabliaux* where each comic moment leads inevitably to the next and the final joke celebrates values that have been evident from the beginning. Here instead laughter forces the reader to conceptualize the couple’s romantic loving through a different set of values. Against Pandarus’s comic pull, *Troilus and Criseyde* cannot remain a simple romance. The comic dimension of the poem destabilizes its meanings so decisively that they cannot recoallesce with any stability. On the other hand, the Pandaric vein of the poem cannot refuse the power of the romantic vein. The two remain in

²⁹ Stephen A. Barney, *Riverside Chaucer, Troilus and Criseyde*, note to 3. 1555–82.

³⁰ Winthrop Wetherbee, for instance, writes: “. . . The real meaning of the scene is in the utter betrayal of Troilus which it represents, the travesty of his pure devotion in its combination of blatant innuendo with suggestions of blasphemy.” “The Descent from Bliss: ‘Troilus’ III. 1310–1582,” *Chaucer’s Troilus: Essays in Criticism*, ed. Stephen A. Barney (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1980), 297–317; here 308.

³¹ Steven R. Guthrie says of Pandarus that he “commits symbolic rape” in this scene. Guthrie describes Pandarus’s relationship with Criseyde as “particularly invasive.” “Chivalry and Privacy in *Troilus and Criseyde* and *La Chastelaine de Vergy*,” *Chaucer Review* 34.2 (1999): 150–73; here 171.

³² Sarah Stanbury, “The Voyeur and the Private Life in *Troilus and Criseyde*,” *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 13 (1991): 141–58; here 156, writes, “The stanza is extraordinary in its powers of cancellation; it cancels itself immediately, but only after threatening to cancel the preceding love scene”

stasis, holding each other in check as mutually contradictory but valid views of the same reality. And that, of course, is what they are.³³

Unlike *fabliau* comedy, then, the comedy of *Troilus and Criseyde* is neither culminating nor fulfilling. At its bedroom peak, motivated by the idea that desire is lust and loving is the enacting of lust, the poem's comedy exists alongside its amazingly beautiful and moving celebration of desire as the life-transfiguring pathway to ecstatic union, the force that makes possible the individual's identification with the rhythms of the universe: "'Love, that of erthe and se hath governaunce . . .'" (3.1744; "Love that rules earth and sea"), as Troilus sings. This is not the super-clever, easy humor of *fabliau*. This is Chaucerian humor *Troilus and Criseyde* style, a major part of a major literary work by a major comic writer.

³³ Richard W. Fehrenbacher argues that this episode must be read in the context of the many references to incest throughout the poem. "'Al that which chargeth nought to seye': The Theme of Incest in *Troilus and Criseyde*," *Exemplaria* 9.2 (1997): 341–69.

Chapter 15

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Laughing in and Laughing at the Old French *Fabliaux*

Fabliau humor and comic logic poke fun at everyday life and everyday people, exploring a variety of human experiences by ridiculing them. The Old French *fabliaux* are short narratives in verse that delivered satirical messages for the enjoyment of mid-thirteenth century audiences. Some *fabliaux* have complex narrative structures, while others have very little plot and could be labeled as something akin to a dirty joke or urban legend today. If one commonality among diverse *fabliaux* is the attempt to define human nature, that definition includes the Aristotelian notion that part of what defines humanity is the ability to laugh. This Aristotelian view of humans and groups as defined by laughter is reflected by the *fabliaux*, in which laughs resonate alongside critical words and images of comic realism.

Laughter is a universal form of human communication, and as such is a “fundamental characteristic of human life,” as Albrecht Classen’s chapter affirms. Listening closer to *fabliau* laughs may help us to better define the genre and the humor within it. Laughs in the *fabliaux* offer some insight into what medieval people thought was funny and how they laughed at themselves.¹ The laughs indicate humor when it might not be otherwise evident; in other words, it is perhaps not the case that “you had to be there,” to find what was funny in the *fabliaux* if you listen for laughter.

¹ In analyzing the variety of *fabliaux* laughter, and its possible reception, both contingent on many different situations and conditions, it is important to keep in mind the crucial point made by Mark Burde in the present volume, that “ . . . laughter is caught in a dialectic of identification versus alienation, it is highly context-dependent in expression despite being a human universal in production, and it is variously associated with either the highest and most ethereal aspects of the spirit or the lowest bodily pulsions.”

Joseph Bédier's early generic definition and endeavor to spur scholarly interest in this problematic and previously scorned genre was characterized by the laughter of an imagined medieval bourgeois audience, labeling the tales "*contes à rire en vers*" (tales written in verse to laugh at). In other words, the *fabliaux* are essentially tales that may make or, more prescriptively, should make the audience laugh.² Though not all of the extant *fabliaux* are obviously funny, or may not seem funny to us today, target audiences may well have smiled, grinned, giggled, smirked, sniggered, or chuckled at the ironic, bawdy, or scatological jokes found in much of the comic corpus. Bédier's simplistic definition of the genre has been considered dated by some and countless studies since have shown how the audience may interpret the black humor and seemingly bizarre logic found in the *fabliaux*. This study proposes that many *fabliaux* may be revisited to explore the role of the *rire*, or more specifically, the explicit laughs heard within the narrative itself in order to better understand what is considered funny, how medieval audiences may have laughed and how the unique humor of the *fabliaux* may be better interpreted. Out-loud laughs in the *fabliaux* serve several narrative or metanarrative functions. Depictions of laughter, acting as humorous signals voiced by the narrator or the fictional characters, magnify orality, corporeality, comedy, and more serious messages in the narratives.

The *fabliaux* represent much more than just a corpus of droll or obscene stories, to which the multitude of different critical and philological approaches to reading this problematic corpus attests.³ Jean Jost's chapter provides a thorough overview of past critical approaches to studying the humor in this elusive comic genre and

² The often cited definition appeared in Joseph Bédier's pioneering study, *Les Fabliaux: études de la littérature populaire et l'histoire littéraire du moyen âge* (Paris: Emile Bouillon, 1893) and 6th ed. (Paris: Champion, 1982). 39. Investigating humor in romance and other Old French genres is the landmark volume by Philippe Ménard, *Le Rire et le sourire dans le roman courtois en France (1150–1250)*. Publications Romanes et Françaises, 105 (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1969).

³ Several differing approaches and attempts to define the genre include, in addition to Bédier's pioneering study, though this is not an exhaustive list: *The Humor of the Fabliaux: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Thomas Darlington Cooke and Benjamin L. Honeycutt (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1974); Howard Bloch, *The Scandal of the Fabliaux* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986); Charles Muscatine, *The Old French Fabliaux* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1986); Mary Jane Stearns Schenck, *The Fabliaux: Tales of Wit and Deception*. Purdue University Monographs in Romance Languages, 24 (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1987); Norris J. Lacy, *Reading Fabliaux*. Garland Reference Library of the Humanities, 1805 (New York and London: Garland, 1993; 2nd ed. Birmingham, AL: Summa, 1999); Brian J. Levy, *The Comic Text: Patterns and Images in the Old French Fabliaux*. Faux Titre, 186 (Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi, 2000); *Comic Provocations: Exposing the Corpus of Old French Fabliaux*, ed. Holly A. Crocker. Studies in Arthurian and Courtly Cultures (New York and Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Roy Percy, *Logic and Humour in the Fabliaux: An Essay in Applied Narratology* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, and Rochester, NY: Boydell and Brewer, 2007); *The Old French Fabliaux: Essays on Comedy and Context*, ed. Kristin Burr, John F. Moran, and Norris J. Lacy (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2007).

demonstrates the carnivalesque nature and social function of the *fabliaux* through the application of Bakhtinian analysis; in line with her chapter, the present study focuses on particular explicit laughs heard within *fabliaux* and *fabliaux*. The act of laughing is an ambiguous gesture in the *fabliaux*, sometimes transgressing boundaries, other times reinforcing them, and always interpretation or appreciation.

The Old French *fabliaux* voice a comic discourse in which we hear laughter used to communicate or reiterate important messages about societal interactions and about human nature in all areas of life, from commercial transactions to domestic disputes.⁴ Jean Jost's chapter reveals the social and cathartic power of the comic message of the *fabliaux* and the humorous treatment of everyday life. On one level, laughing with others or at ourselves helps us to better define human nature; on another, it helps us to better interpret the messages communicated to us. I argue that messages are conveyed orally through laughs in the *fabliaux*, just as they are communicated through words or through actions and forms of non-verbal communication, such as gestures or body language.⁵ With regard to a hypothetical contemporary audience, laughter in the *fabliaux* universe serves to direct interpretation of the message, whether the message is didactic or amusing or both, and also to provide a more general critique of the difficulties, misunderstandings, or mixed-messages inherent in most interpersonal communications. Explicit laughing at or laughing with occur in the tales explored below, as when characters mock one another or when a *fablieur* or narrator laughs at his/her own jokes. Below, close readings of laughter in seven representative *fabliaux* (*Le Vilain mire*, *Le Foteor*, *Boivin de Provins*, *Les Trois chanoinesses de Cologne*, *Aloul*, *Cele Qui se fiste foutre sur la fosse de son mari*, and *Le Chevalier qui fiste parler les cons*), with references to others, will illustrate the form and function of *fabliaux* laugh tracks and provide an example of the application of a useful typology for different varieties of laughter heard throughout the corpus.

⁴ Of course, the German tradition is similar in this way and includes similar comic messages and humorous views of human nature in areas ranging from commerce to sexuality, in which laughter may be heard, as Albrecht Classen's chapter on late-Medieval German narratives illustrates in the present volume. See also Sebastian Coxon, *Laughter and Narrative in the Later Middle Ages: German Comic Tales c. 1350–1525* (London: Legenda, 2008). For examples of the more specifically sexual humor in the German tradition, frequently analogous to that found in the Old French *fabliaux*, see *Erotic Tales of Medieval Germany*, ed. Albrecht Classen. The Old French *fabliaux* inspired Chaucerian *fabliaux*; many scholars have explored this connection, to which Gretchen Mieszkowski's chapter refers.

⁵ Gestures, looks, and facial expressions play an important role in non-verbal communication in text and image in many medieval genres, as demonstrated by J. A. Burrows, *Gestures and Looks in Medieval Narrative*. Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature, 48 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

Laughing mouths, and indeed other unexpected laughing body parts, appear alongside eating mouths, lying mouths, dirty mouths, and smiling mouths in the *fabliaux*.⁶ The comic realism and situational comedy in the genre are magnified by descriptions of physical laughter. Laughing is a public, shared act in this genre. Characters do not laugh in private or snicker to themselves quietly, and narratorial laughter is directed outward at the audience.⁷ *Fabliau* laughter appears to some extent analogous to the studio laugh track that accompanies television sitcoms, similar to a separate soundtrack indicating funny situations to the audience, targeting a particular character as the butt of a joke, or signaling the end of the show—though the anachronistic analogy has many limitations, of course. The laugh track within the narrative is effective in part because of the human tendency to laugh along when others are laughing, to laugh when it is deemed acceptable to laugh. Television laugh tracks and *fabliau* narrative laughs are part of the performance and they work because the laughter of others may act as a prescriptive invitation to laugh, or may become “contagious,” as multiple studies in the psychology of laughter have shown.⁸ Because laughter may be contagious, it crosses boundaries, moving beyond the text to reduce the distance between the narrator or characters and the audience, thereby allowing the audience to sympathize with or laugh at or with the narrator or a character at other characters.

Eating, laughing, and speaking are often juxtaposed in the *fabliaux*. When the three oral activities are combined, resulting in enhanced entertainment value, or perhaps what Norris J. Lacy has pointed to the “good fun” function of the genre.⁹ Many of the *fabliaux* center on food objects as part of the plot. Eating is one of the two most frequently described physical activities. Eating also draws attention to the mouth, speech, and laughter. Several *fabliaux* set in culinary spaces such as kitchens, food cellars, dining tables, or marketplaces. Moreover, much of the humor is food related.¹⁰ Underlining the possible importance of food in their performance and reception, Charles Muscatine poignantly described the *fabliaux*, as “an after-dinner genre,” thus a comic recital designed mainly for mealtime

⁶ On the conflation of the mouth and orifices in the context of sexuality, gender, speech, and knowledge in the *fabliaux* and other Medieval French genres, see the feminist approach taken by E. Jane Burns, *Bodytalk: When Women Speak in Old French Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993).

⁷ See the contribution to this volume by Madelon Köhler-Busch for similarity in the German romance tradition.

⁸ “Laughter and Smiles,” *Encyclopedia of 20th-Century American Humor*, ed. Alleen Pace Nilsen and Don L. F. Nilsen (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000), 184–86; here 185.

⁹ Norris J. Lacy, *Reading Fabliaux*. Garland Reference Library of the Humanities, 1805 (New York and London: Garland, 1993), 143.

¹⁰ I explore food humor in the *fabliaux* and other Old French genres in my *Culinary Comedy in Medieval French Literature*. *Purdue Studies in Romance Literatures*, 37 (Purdue: Purdue University Press, 2006).

entertainment.¹¹ Some *fabliaux* include requests of food as payment for *jongleurs*, as is the case in *Jouquet* (NRCF vol. II), in which the performer is paid in pears at a wedding banquet. It is possible that oral performance of certain *fabliaux* was common during or after meal time, though we do not have much evidence of the performance or reception of these tales. The frequent depictions of people eating and laughing while storytelling provide some indication of the manner in which the tales themselves may have been performed or interpreted; moreover, they are further indication of their oral emphasis.

One major characteristic of the *fabliau* genre is orality. As Evelyn Birge Vitz has demonstrated extensively on the orality, performativity, and performance of the *fabliaux* and romance genres and the octosyllabic rhyming couplet, "many *fabliaux* were, we know, performed from memory by minstrels and *jongleurs*."¹² Common to other genres of the time, several extant *fabliaux* claim oral sources, refer to oral performance, or depict *jongleurs* telling stories aloud, while others involve verbal deceit and misunderstandings of speech, or refer to eating. Another salient feature of the genre is corporeality, with bodily functions and bodily appetites common in *fabliaux* imagery and description. Eating and laughing are both forms of comic oral communication and exchange between the characters and between the narrator and audiences, and instances of both send comic messages.

An overview of the Old French language of laughter employed in these texts is useful in understanding their comic messages. Physical expressions of grief, disappointment, suffering, disgust, and joy or pleasure are common in the *fabliaux*. Verbs indicating laughing, smiling, and gestures of mocking appear particularly in *fabliaux* that feature food humor or verbal jokes. Several of the over one-hundred sixty extant *fabliaux* identify themselves as funny, mention the telling of jokes, or *truffes*, and set the goal of laughter or amusement, as one tale defines: "Ce sont des risés pour esbatre/Les roys, les princes et les contes" (vv. 200–01; They are jokes to amuse kings, princes, and counts.).¹³ Certain anonymous *fableors* appear conscious of the laughter they hope to provoke, repeatedly equating their own narratives to *risées* (jokes). Certain tales even give names to the jokes told within them. *Le Vilain au buffet* (NRCF vol. II), for instance, includes a contest between

¹¹ Charles Muscatine, *Medieval Literature, Style, and Culture: Essays* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1999), 164.

¹² Evelyn Birge Vitz, *Orality and Performance in Early French Romance* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, and Rochester, NY: Boydell and Brewer, 1999), 21.

¹³ *Fabliaux* citations follow the standard critical edition: *Nouveau Recueil complet des fabliaux* (NRCF), ed. Willem Noomen and Nico van den Boogaard. 10 vols. (Assen, Netherlands: Van Gorcum, 1983–1996), including the following tales cited below: *Le Vilain Mire* (NRCF vol. II, 309–47), *Le Foteor* (NRCF vol. VI, 51–75), *Boivin de Provins* (NRCF vol. II, 96–105), *Les Trois chanoinesses de Cologne* (NRCF vol. X, 85–113), *Aloul* (NRCF vol. III, 1–44), *Cele Qui se fiste foutre sur la fosse de son mari* (NRCF vol. III, 466–71), and *Le Chevalier qui fiste parler les cons* (NRCF vol. III, 41–173). Translations of titles and translations or paraphrases of the texts are my own.

minstrels, “qui la millour trufe saroit” (v. 144; who would know the best joke), and which one knew “mainte gaberie,” and “mainte risee” (vv. 158–59; many jokes) to make people laugh.

The canned laughter in the genre is signaled to the audience, or perhaps to the jocular *jongleurs* who may be performing it, by several key terms.¹⁴ Frequent terms in Old French that refer to laughing in the texts explored are: the verb *rire* (to laugh) or *riser* (to mock, to laugh in one’s face), *risee* (mockery, laughing stock, or butt of a joke), *esclaffer* (to laugh, to burst out laughing), and *esjoir* (to enjoy, often with a sexual connotation). The most common rhyme is *dire/rire* (to say or tell/to laugh), thereby associating laughter with talking or communication, along with the past participles *dit/ri/dist/fist/rist*. Again equating laughter and communication, the rhyme *dire/sourire* (to speak/to smile) also appears in the genre. Other references to smiling, such as the verb *sourire*, or the facial expression associated with smiling, *bele chiere* (smile, nice expression) appear for example in *Le Sacristain moine* (NRCF vol. VII), in which a male character makes the declaration of devotion, “Dame,” fet il, a bele chiere/Ferai lors quant que vos vodrois,” (vv. 700–01; “Lady,” said he with a smile/“I will do whatever you would like”).

Less common are the rhymes *tire/rire* (*Aloul*, vv. 845–46; to hit or pull/to laugh) or *rit/vit/dit* in the same tale, which magnify the sexual humor in the text with a pun on *vit* (past tense of the verb to see) and *vit* (familiar term for penis). There are also the rhymes that link laughing, speaking, and watching to animal metaphors for genitalia in *L’Esquirit* (The Squirrel) (NRCF vol. VI, 33–49). In addition to *rire*, the vast semantic field of jokes and joking includes: *gabez/gaberie/gab/gas, se moquer, truffle/truffe dire*, as used to describe the joke in *Les Trois chanoinesses de Cologne*.¹⁵ *Etre liez* (to be happy, overjoyed) is often associated with the verb *rire*. The intention to speak or make a joke in order to *faire rire* (to make somebody laugh), also occurs, as in *Le Prestre teint* (NRCF vol. VII), in which a witty husband jokes about a naked priest not resembling a crucifix, ostensibly to make his wife and others laugh in the face of a awkward nudity, quite literally. In addition, the verbal and affective opposition *rire/plore* (to laugh/to cry) occurs more than once.

To generalize, *fabliau* language, including the commonly employed terms related to laughter outlined above, is self-aware or self-reflexive. Laughs may signal expected interpretations or even emotions to the audience. In the same way,

¹⁴ Willem Noomen provides a valuable etymology of *jongleur* going back to the Old French performer *jogleor* and the Latin *joculator*, or performing buffoon, and discusses terms used in the *fabliaux* in his introduction to *Le Jongleur par lui-même: Choix de dits et de fabliaux* (Louvain and Paris: Peeters, 2003), 4–5.

¹⁵ The meaning of the Old French term *gab* and its significance as a comic genre or subgenre often involving drinking, eating, and boasting or taunting, was illuminated by John L. Grigsby, *The ‘Gab’ as a Latent Genre in Medieval French: Drinking and Boasting in the Middle Ages*. Medieval Academy Books, 103 (Cambridge, MA: Medieval Academy of America, 2000).

laughs within the narrative may trigger light-hearted readings or reactions, although they also can, and often do, point toward deeper implications and epistemological concerns.

Types of Laughter

There are thus several terms to indicate laughter in the *fabliaux* and several causes for laughter. In humor theory, at least three bases for laughter exist: laughter based on incongruity, laughter aimed at demonstrating superiority over others, and laughter as relief.¹⁶ To explore the types of laughs resulting from superiority, incongruity, or relief, we may recruit much-cited socio-psychologists Giles and Oxford for their authoritative presentation of the “multidimensional” nature of humor and laughter and the seven categories of laughter, which link laughing to various causal factors. The seven categories are fluid in the *fabliaux* and can be combined effectively from the Giles and Oxford model:¹⁷

1. Humorous laughter: this is the most common type, laughing at a verbal joke or visual incongruity, etc.
2. Social laughter: this is laughter that serves to integrate an individual or individuals into a given group and to exclude others; thus Giles and Oxford echo Bergson’s earlier definition of laughter as social, since “notre rire est toujours le rire d’un groupe” (our laughter is always the laughter of a group).¹⁸ Most laughter is a form of social cue or interaction for Giles and Oxford.
3. Ignorance laughter: this is akin to laughing to hide that we did not “get” the

¹⁶ The superiority theory of humor as it is commonly understood today recalls Aristotelian notions of humor, while the incongruous nature of the humor is akin to Kantian and Bergsonian causes of laughter as discussed in the present volume. Linguistic humor theorist John Morreall calls into question the validity of theorizing humor and laughter at all then provides an analysis of each of the three categories and suggests a more comprehensive theory as well that involves laughter as simply a form of “pleasant psychological shift,” in his *Taking Laughter Seriously* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1983). 39.

¹⁷ Howard Giles and G.S. Oxford, “Towards a Multidimensional Theory of Laughter Causation and its Social Implications,” *Bulletin of the British Psychological Society* 23 (1970): 97–105. Freud had posited over twenty categories, which were then reduced or combined by later theorists. Chapman and Foot’s study on linguistic theories of humor shows that the seven types of laughter are not mutually exclusive and that laughter may share elements of more than one of the above causes, and that there indeed may exist other types or nuances, *Humor and Laughter: Theory, Research, and Applications*, ed. Anthony J. Chapman and Hugh C. Foot (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1996).

¹⁸ Henri Bergson, *Le Rire: Essai sur la signification du comique* (Paris: Editions Alcan, 1924), 5. To simplify very briefly, Bergson’s essay shows that laughter makes social interaction possible for humanity and that we find it funny when something inhuman or mechanical in nature is juxtaposed onto something human or natural.

joke.

4. Derision laughter: this is “used in social situations as a weapon to ridicule others” or for “scapegoating.” In the *fabliaux* both laughing at another’s expense and scapegoating are common as is laughter for the sake of humiliation. One definition of Aristotelian laughter is essentially derisive in nature and has for a purpose demonstrating superiority.¹⁹
- 5.–7. The remaining three types of laughter are: 5. nervous laughter from anxiety (related to the Freudian notion of laughter as a release or relief from nervous energy or Bakhtin’s carnival laughter), 6. apologetic laughter, and 7. laughter as an automatic reaction to the physical stimulation of tickling. The final three do not appear commonly in this corpus.

These causes or predictors for laughter are a helpful tool in interpreting the ambiguous satire and complex comic logic of the *fabliaux*.

Rereading the *fabliaux* using the three types of humor (incongruity, superiority, relief) and the seven categories of laughter above, as our critical lens reveals much about how the *fabliaux* may have been received. Some short bursts of ridiculing laughter may appear with one character reflecting on having duped another; other laughs and act as invitations to laughter for the audience, certainly, but also act in an exclusionary manner to delineate social groups or define a particular character as ignorant, as other, or as a scapegoat. It is rare that the audience is made fun of, unless members of the audience identify with the professions or gender of the characters, which are primarily stereotypical representations.

Henri Bergson’s notion of laughter as social, the idea that we have a tendency to laugh with the winner in a given situation, with the *dupeur* rather than the dupe, generally holds true in the *fabliaux*. How winning or superiority is determined varies from tale to tale but is often related to the humorous humiliation of others; winning may be gender specific, as Lisa Perfetti has suggested: “The kind of ‘winning’ sought by women is not always achieved through dominating the household or getting away with adultery but rather by making a joke that others (particularly arrogant husbands) don’t get.”²⁰ Laughter is exclusionary in terms of gender and may also be specific to social classes. For Bergson, most laughter is group laughter that involves the humiliation of others. If one gets the joke, one is part of the group. Though we may feel sorry for the gullible *fabliau* dupe, it often is the case that we get the joke and are laughing at the victim, the cuckold husband, the *trompeur trompé*. Such outbursts of superiority laughter indicate with which characters we may sympathize, with which characters we may identify. Audiences today may find that many such laughs in the *fabliaux* are marked with

¹⁹ For further discussion of Aristotle on laughter, see the contribution to the present volume by Mark Burde.

²⁰ Lisa Perfetti, “The Lewd and the Ludic: Female Pleasure in the *Fabliaux*,” *Comic Provocations: Exposing the Corpus of Old French Fabliaux*, 17–32; here 20.

cruelty; indeed Michael Billig's theory of humor shows that it is not necessarily good, seeing cruelty as a feature of most humor.²¹ Frequently, the *fabliau* laugh track directs us to laugh when others fall down, to laugh at their reversals of fortune or their silly misunderstandings. Cleverly, this humiliating or cruel laughing at others amplifies the didactic or comic messages of several *fabliaux*, as is evident in the different types of laughter heard in *Le Vilain mire*, *Le Foteor*, *Boivin de Provins*, *Les Trois chanoinesses de Cologne*, *Aloul*, *Cele Qui se fiste foutre sur la fosse de son mari*, and *Le Chevalier qui fiste parler les cons*.

The *Fabliaux* Laugh Track

Le Vilain mire (The Peasant Doctor) is a satire of social classes and social interaction that mocks the medical profession as well as credulous and hypochondriac patients. It is a comedy of errors targeting both *vilains* who attempt social mobility and quack doctors who are paid for supposed miracle remedies, the latter an all too common reality in this period. There are several possible morals to be drawn from the story, but the central recurring proverbial moral repeated here is that laughter is the best medicine. Laughter being the best medicine, literally and metaphorically, it is able to cure, to affect change, to comfort, to save, even to transform one's status in life. The sudden eruption of laughter made possible in *Le Vilain mire* is perhaps a nod to the power of the *fabliaux* to communicate and to enact change through laughter.

The king's young lovesick daughter suffers from a fish bone that is caught in her throat. She is unable to eat, drink, or communicate verbally after swallowing this bone. Again, eating and communicating are juxtaposed. The desperate young woman is ill and seeks a cure from any source:

La fille au roi, est si malade:
 Il a passé uit jor entier
 Que ne pot boivre ne mengier
 Que une areste de poison
 Li aresta eul gavion. (vv. 133–37)

[The king's daughter is so sick, she has spent eight whole days unable to drink or eat because a fish bone blocked her throat.]

The worried family calls for a doctor to come remove the fish bone and ease her suffering. As part of a swindle, a peasant woman tries to convince them that her husband, the *vilain mire*, is a talented healer. In true *fabliau* style, the vengeful wife

²¹ Michael Billig, *Laughter and Ridicule: Towards a Social Critique of Humor*. Theory, Culture & Society (London: Sage Publications, 2005).

says her husband is only able to help if he has been beaten up before treating the patient. The peasant quack doctor is paid in food and dozens of patients arrive to be cured, when he unwittingly succeeds in removing the bone. The incapable, untrained peasant is able to cure her by making her laugh, thereby dislodging the fish bone, which flies out of her mouth into the fire. The obstruction is thus removed by laughter. The words for *arrest de poisson* (fish bone), the verb *arreter* (to stop), and *arrêt/arreste* (stop, stop-up, a stoppage) are cleverly confounded. One scholar has pointed out these multiple meanings and has suggested that the obstructing fishbone could represent her virginity, notably "... the blockage of the *arreste* is something she shares with her father the king, and can be seen as a fetishization of her virginity."²²

The silence and choking relieved by laughter could also represent an impediment in communication that is cured. The constrained communication and lack of laughter here echoes the cursed young *demoiselle qui rit* in Chrétien's romance *Le Conte du graal*, who, according to a fool's prophecy, cannot laugh until she sees the best of all knights (vv. 1059–62).²³ Such women laughing, with joyful outbursts after periods of painful silence and obstacles to communication, may present a commentary on women's communication (indeed, women's knowledge or power, too) being facilitated through humor and laughter.

In the quintessential *fabliaux* of a voyeur, *Le Foteor* (The Professional Fornicator), a minstrel, and later we discover gigolo, comes to town looking for the most beautiful woman in that location.²⁴ A married woman he discovers on the road laughs that this lady's man has mistaken her maid for her. The voyeur *foteor* has been watching the maid eat and dress (vv. 136–41). The wife laughs at his hapless voyeurism and he is not happy about the joke or mockery, "Que vos m'avez ensi gabee / ... La dame la voit, si s'en rit ... " (vv. 134, 138; Since you made fun of me like this. The lady sees this and laughs about it). She laughs at the confusion over the maid and laughs at him when he announces he is a traveling male prostitute offering his services "Je sui fouteres a loier" (v. 170; I am a fornicator for hire). He

²² Daniel M. Murtaugh, "Rich Peasants in the Old French *Fabliaux*," *Philological Quarterly* 86.1–2 (2007): 27–46; here 33.

²³ Chrétien de Troyes, *Le Roman de Perceval ou Le Conte du graal*, ed. Keith Busby (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1993). Paul Rockwell has discussed the significance of laughter in this romance, "The Promise of Laughter: Irony and Allegory in *Le Conte dou graal* and *Li Chevaliers as deus espees*," *Courtly Arts and the Art of Courtliness: Selected Papers from the Eleventh Triennial Congress of the International Courtly Literature Society*, ed. Keith Busby and Christopher Kleinhenz (Woodbridge, Suffolk and Rochester, NY: Boydell and Brewer, 2006), 573–86; here 577–79.

²⁴ An analysis of the humorous erotic tricksters in *Le Foteor*, a Middle Dutch analogue, a German analogue in the *maeren*, and similar narratives appears in *Risus Mediaevalis: Laughter in Medieval Literature and Art*, ed. Herman Braet, Guido Latré, and Werner Verbeke. *Mediaevalia Lovaniensa*, 30 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2003), 186–88.

explains that he (i.e., his storytelling and his body) are for rent and she laughs aloud, allowing the audience to find this proposition of male prostitution funny, too. This laughter of derision amplifies the two women's knowledge and enables them to communicate together about this individual. In addition, laughing puts the wife and her maid in a position of power in relation to the man. The wife is able to criticize him through ridicule, to turn the situation around as she looks at him and laughs, thereby inviting the audience to laugh, certainly, but also to think twice about the gender roles portrayed. Such laughs may be "liberating" or "subversive," as Albrecht Classen's chapter suggests, and such laughs may also call into question gender, or professional and social class hierarchies, just as the *fabliaux* themselves question order through the disruption of their often exaggerated or shocking humor.

In *Boivin de Provins*, characters again make fun of one another in a raucous social satire of town life. Here nudges, winks, and other gestures and sounds reveal a similar tone of mockery. *Boivin* is an account of eating in taverns and visiting prostitutes, getting money stolen, getting tricked, becoming violent, and looking back at all of these events with a laugh and a smile.²⁵ Within the narrative itself, the unlucky titular hero gives his own narrative and recounts his misfortunes in being cheated at the tavern and bordello to the provost. Boivin immediately recounts the unfavorable events and recalls his plight often as an entertaining anecdote for family and friends:

Boivin s'en vint droit au provost.
 Se li a conté mot a mot,
 De chief en chief, la verité;
 Et li provos l'a escouté,
 Qui mout ama la lecherie.
 Sovent li fist conter sa vie
 A ses parens, a ses amis,
 Qui mout s'en sont joué et ris

(vv. 367–74).

[Boivin went straight to the provost. He recounted to him everything word for word, from one end to the other, the truth; and the provost, who really liked the folly in the story, listened to it. Often he recounted his life to his family, to his friends, who enjoyed it and laughed.]

²⁵

Jean Jost's chapter discusses other violent *fabliaux* episodes and exposes the carnivalesque function of *fabliaux* violence. Functions of the often seemingly extreme or shocking violence in the *fabliaux* is investigated in Mary E. Leech, "That's Not Funny: Comic Forms, Didactic Purpose, and Physical Injury in Medieval Comic Tales," *LATCH: A Journal for the Study of the Literary Artifact in Theory, Culture, or History* 1 (2008): 105–27. For a wide-ranging investigation of the ambiguous representations of violence in other more "courtly" medieval genres across Europe, see the essays in *Violence in Medieval Courtly Literature: A Casebook*, ed. Albrecht Classen. Routledge Medieval Casebooks (New York and London: Routledge, 2004).

Boivin is paid with money and with laughter when he tells his own story. This ending not only heightens the orality of the narrative, but also establishes the significance of oral transmission, and in particular remunerated or valued performance, of comic stories. The laugh heard here constitutes social laughter by a group and derisive laughter. In this *mise en abyme*, the laughter behaves as an invitation for extra-textual laughter and constitutes a metadiscourse about *fabliaux* humor and performance. On one level, it could potentially be an image of the genesis of a *fabliau*, the creation of an urban legend, the first telling of a tale.

In a more pronounced *fabliau*-within-a-*fabliau* structure, *Les Trois chanoinesses de Cologne*, a storyteller delights his audience with an account of three women in the city who enjoy entertaining jokes and stories. The women request he tell them a dirty story. Again, the storyteller, similar to a *fableor*, gives the audience what they want. For this easily-amused audience with their minds in the proverbial gutter, whether or not it represents a hypothetical *fabliau* audience, storytelling and joke telling are confounded since the primary purpose of spinning such filthy yarns is to get people to laugh. The appreciative audience requests another dirty story, this time specifying that the story be about penises that will make them laugh until they “wet their pants,” or “get wet from laughing.” The women listen while “elbowing,” or “nudging,” each other knowingly and laughing at his last tale, as the fictional *fableor* of the *Les Trois chanoinesses* boasts:

Et quant mes dis fu trais a fin
 Que chascune ot bien escouté,
 L'une en a l'autre bouté
 Et distrent que c'iert tres bien dit.
 Puis me firent un autre dit
 Commencier par commandement,
 Qui parlast plus profondement
 De paroles crasses et doilles
 “Si que rises nous moilles,
 Dist l'une des mieus emparlees” (vv. 128–38)

[And when my story came to an end and both women had heard it well, one nudges the other and they said that it was very well told. Then they made me start another story with more profoundly filthy and dirty speech. “If we laugh until we wet ourselves . . .”]

They offer to be an appreciative audience, and request that the story be lively and dirty more enough to make them wet their pants. They command that it be about touching a penis and promise that this will make them laugh more, “Mais ce qui mieus rire nous face!” (vv. 128–43; but that which will make us laugh better). The audience of the comic *mise en abyme* is portrayed as female and requesting and

responding to entertaining tales of a crass, sexual nature.²⁶ Here laughter and enjoyment are the principal goals of storytelling achieved, “de ce ristrent elles assez” (v. 150; they laughed about this enough). There is also the implication that shared laughter may be accompanied by nudging another person or that uncontrollable laughter may be accompanied by urination, again exaggerating the physical laughter and the corporeal nature of *fabliaux* humor that often centers on bodily functions. Naturally, we may not assume that the preferences or reactions expressed by the audience within the tale hold true for the original audience of the genre; however, the function of the social laughing and nudging in this metanarrative hints at the potential circumstances of audience reception or the material may have elicited humorous laughter among medieval audiences.

In another tale of carnal jest, the highly corporeal *fabliau* *Aloul* invites humorous laughter through the incongruous confusion of food and body parts. As seen through Jean E. Jost’s astute analysis, *Aloul* is complex and humor functions on more than one level. The narrative leading up to the laugh is discussed in Jost’s chapter. The joke has more than one punch-line: a female servant discovers the deceitful wife’s lover in the barn in the dark, grabbing his testicles as she mistakes him for sheep at first, until he seduces/rapes her, too. The offending lothario flees to the barn and when the cuckold husband and his servants enter later in the dark, one touches his penis and assumes it is a hung sausage. When the servant is about to cut off a piece of supposed sausage, the priest drops down on him and the servant believes the hung meat is attacking.²⁷ The bystanders begin to laugh together as they hit what they may think is the priest or ham, but is *Aloul*. The violence is mixed with laughter, showing that the brutal scenario is laughable: “Tout vint, n’en ert nes uns a tire/Lors commencierent tuit a rire” (vv. 845–56; They all come forward, they all hit, then they all start to laugh). Remarkably, they laugh in unison. This is an instance of social laughter, as the group starts to act and

²⁶ For analyses of sexual mores, humor, imagery, and language in the *fabliaux* and an index of sexually active *fabliaux* characters, see John W. Baldwin, *The Language of Sex: Five Voices from Northern France around 1200*. The Chicago Series on Sexuality, History, and Society (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994). See also my study on *fabliaux* sexual food humor, as well as the other essays on representations of medieval sexuality in the same volume, Sarah Gordon, “Sausages, Nuts, and Eggs: Food Imagery, the Body, and Sexuality in the Old French *Fabliaux*,” *Sexuality in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Age: New Approaches to a Fundamental Cultural-Historical and Literary Anthropological Theme*, ed. Albrecht Classen. Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture Series, 3 (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter Press, 2008), 503–16.

²⁷ With much laughter at the expense of lecherous and gluttonous priest or clerics, many *fabliaux* center on anticlerical discourse. Not all *fabliaux* about priests are necessarily anticlerical, however. For a comprehensive exploration of the complex critical and humorous representations of priests throughout the corpus, see Daron Burrows, *The Stereotype of the Priest in the Old French Fabliaux: Anticlerical Satire and Lay Identity* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005). On humor and parody related to religious, liturgical, and sacred subjects, see the important theoretical contribution by Mark Burde in the present volume.

to laugh together, cruelly perhaps, with the group mocking another individual as they assault him violently. This episode is comprised of humorous and social laughter brought about by an incongruous misunderstanding. This violent group laughter suggests that violence, brutality, and cruelty may be interpreted as humorous and are something the audience may laugh at when listening to a *fabliau*.

Out-loud laughter in the *fabliaux* helps to broach many taboo subjects, indeed. *Cele Qui se fiste foutre sur la fosse de son mari* (The Woman Who Had Sex on the Grave of Her Husband) is about a recent widow who cries and complains all too bitterly of her grief while lying on top of her husband's grave. Unstable emotions characterize the widow, as does her inappropriate laughter as she is portrayed alternating laughing and crying hysterically while on the grave, "de noiant rit, de noiant pleure" (v. 116–17; laughing at nothing, crying at nothing). The *fabliaux* present a never-ending battle of the sexes and this tale shows both men and women laughing. Again combining voyeurism and orality, watching and laughing, a squire watching the scene offers, "Je gajéré se vos volez" (v. 53; I would bet, if you want), with his knight that he can seduce her even though she appears so sad because she is fickle. Laughter and betting or games and laughter and sexuality are associated here as elsewhere in the *fabliaux*. Typical *fabliau* comedy ensues as the squire twists words to obtain what he desires. The wily squire explains that he, too, is in mourning for his true love, whom he loved all too much, which is to say that she died at his hands, and in his arms, "en foutant, douce amie chiere" (vv. 91; while having sex, my dear). Upon hearing this, the widow asks if he is really serious about loving her to death literally, and says that if he is, that wishes to die in this way, too. The knight at first resists his squire's bet as in poor taste and blasphemous.

The tone quickly changes from serious to comic with one laugh. When the squire successfully seduces her quickly, the knight, "de rire se pasme a bien poi" (v. 101; could have well laughed himself until fell unconscious). This narratorial intervention and character's near-prostrate laughing show humorous and derisive types of laughter, inviting the audience to laugh at the more grave subjects suggested by the narrative, such as death, murder, suicide, or rape, also allowing the audience to laugh along with the knight and the widow. The description that he almost collapses laughing, or almost dies laughing, implies the intensity of his reaction. This laugh implies once again how medieval people may have laughed and what they may have thought funny.

The first laugh serves as recognition that the squire has won the bet. Laughter is the only thing exchanged after the bet; no real money changes hands in this humorous wager, as Roy Percy has noted.²⁸ Later, a second social laugh has the

²⁸ Roy Percy, *Logic and Humour in the Fabliaux: An Essay in Applied Narratology*. Gallica, 7

men exchanging laughs as they reflect on the turn of events in a recapitulation, inviting the audience to do so as well, with the verb *rire* followed directly by the narrator's closing and repetition of the title:

Et après en joa et rist.
 Ci fenist de la boene fame,
 Qui fu foutue, ce me samble,
 Sur la fosse de son mari. (vv. 118–21)

[And after enjoyed and laughed about it. Here finishes (the story) about the good lady who had sex, it seems to me, on the grave of her husband.]

Thus, laughter marks the end of the tale in such instances, announcing or concluding the didactic lesson or moral to the story, if any.

Le Chevalier qui fiste parler des cons (The Knight who Made Orifices Talk) is about verbal and non-verbal forms of communication. It investigates interpersonal communications and the value of verbal exchange; but, as the *fabliaux* audience knows to expect the unexpected, it addresses the topic of communication through talking genitalia. Other scholars have read the humorous poem through the lens of gender relations. This unusual tale may be better understood through the laughs heard within it. A knight cannot stop laughing about his new-found power to make vaginas and anuses speak and laughs when he hears the orifice talk: "Li chevaliers n'ot soig de rire,/Quant il oït que il ne palla" (vv. 556–57; The knight could not stop laughing when he heard it, that he almost fell over). Then his skeptical squire, who has bet him, says maybe the women who promised him this incredible power were lying and that this is not possible, but the knight warns that it will speak, while laughing:

"Par mon chief, Huet, tu diz voir! "
 Dist li chevaliers en riant.
 Le cul apele maintenat. (vv. 568–70).

["On my life, Huey," you will see it talk, said the knight laughing, "the hole is calling now."]

In one variant, they then laugh together when they hear the genitalia talking out loud as promised: "Et d'eures en autres riant" (v. 304; they were laughing at each other). The knight laughs at a woman when her genitalia talk. In part as a reaction to the humiliating laughter, the countess tries to stop her genitals from talking but her vagina laughs anyway. When it laughs, they laugh about it and at her, too:

Dou coton que ma dame i'mist
 Li cuenz l'oi assez s'en rist

Et tuit li cheualier s'en ristrent
 Riant a la contesse . . .

(vv. 583–86)

[My lady put cotton in it. The vagina heard that and laughed about it. And all the knights laughed about it, laughing at the countess . . .].

On one level, the laughing mouths and orifices in this tale may poke fun in general at the constant gender power plays and sexual struggles that take place in the *fabliaux*. Later, recalling the post-wager chuckling in *Cele Qui se fiste foutre*, the knight and his squire laugh about this bawdy adventure and their turn of fortune. The variants all use verb *rire* and the adjective *liez* (happy, joyful) to describe the reaction, as in the following version:

Et si s'en vont grant aleure
 Mout riant de cele aventure
 Or est tot liez li cheualiers.

(vv. 301–03)

[And they leave at top speed, laughing a lot about this adventure, so the knight is very happy].

They recount details to one another, laughing at the end of the adventure as they ride off happily into the off-color *fabliau* sunset.

Akin to a laugh track at the end of a television comedy show, *fabliaux* laughter is important to mark the end of an adventure, the punch line of a joke, or the moral of the story. In *Estula* (NRCF IV, 45–61), a laugh marks the successful end of a crime or scheme as well as the moral when the happy thieves happily celebrate their loot and a verbal misunderstanding with a laugh. This final laugh is one of superiority and signals closure while echoing the proverb at the end: “Teus rit au main qui au soir plore” (v. 138; One who laughs in the morning cries at night). A culminating laugh reminds the audience that the story is to be interpreted as humorous, providing a happy ending to a comic tale.

The sound of laughter is part of *fabliau* poetics. The laugh is what makes the world represented in this genre intelligible and what makes it humorous. The narrator or character who laughs last offers an interpretation of the actions within the narrative and invites the audience to laugh at them or with them. A laugh may signal a narrative transition, a cruel or sympathetic narratorial bias, or it may announce a punch line, moral, or ending. Comic narratorial intervention is common in the *fabliaux* and messages are magnified by the laughter within them. The laugh, when it acts as a form of direct narratorial intervention, or as part of a metanarrative, has a diegetic function. A laugh may act as an invitation to (re)interpret or to make light of taboo subjects. Several different types of laughter are heard in the narratives, including humorous laughter, social laughter, ignorance laughter, and most commonly, derisive laughter. Most importantly,

representations of these types of laughs hint at what medieval audiences thought was funny and how they laughed (nudging each other, laughing out loud, or falling on the floor laughing, as the case may be). The self-reflexive *fabliaux* narratives define themselves, laugh at themselves, enjoy themselves, and invite their audience to do the same.

Chapter 16

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Laughter and Medieval Stalls

“For this is not the theatre for laughter, neither did we come together for this intent, that we may give way to immoderate mirth, but that we may groan, and by this groaning inherit a kingdom. But thou, when standing by a king, dost not endure so much as merely to smile; having then the Lord of the angels dwelling in thee, dost thou not stand trembling, and all due self-restraint, but rather laughest, oftentimes when He is displeased? And dost thou not consider that thou provokest Him in this way more than by thy sins?” Saint John Chrysostom’s (ca. 347–407) words at the dawn of the Christian era, as condemnatory as they might sound, do not seem to imply that laughter could not play an important role in the holiest place of Christianity: the church itself and, more specifically, the cathedral, and even less in the canonical choir, its most sacred heart.¹

Chrysostom actually clarified his opinion right at the beginning of his treatise, which we need to keep in mind for the purpose of the present paper: “And these things I say, not to suppress all laughter, but to take away dissipation of mind.” Of course, all those who tended to laugh or created laughable entertainment, such as prostitutes, actors, or flatterers, as he calls them, are not “called unto heaven . . . [and] are enlisted on the devil’s side.” How much, however, his parishioners and disciples, or especially subsequently medieval artists and writers followed this strong urging and preaching, cannot be decided here.

¹ St. John Chrysostom, “On Laughter,” quoted from online text version (in English trans.) at: www.stmaryseattle.com/youth_files/OnLaughter_St_John_Chrysostom.pdf (last accessed on Jan. 30, 2010). Now see Blake Leyerle, *Theatrical Shows and Ascetic Lives: John Chrysostom’s Attack on Spiritual Marriage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001). See also the theoretical discussions of this issue, laughter viewed by the theologians, in Olga V. Trokhimenko’s contribution to this volume.

To discuss medieval laughter is a risky adventure, particularly if one transposes our present mental and aesthetic frame of mind to a fundamentally different culture, even if it may seem so close to us.² Most of the decorated choir stalls still extant today are indeed located in cathedrals. Stalls in abbeys, on the one hand, are less well-known, but on the other they have not fared so well in comparison; they have not been well preserved or and are less illustrated. And yet, one can cite a couple of prominent examples of the latter, including the stalls of the men's La Haye Abbey, near Angers, the extant part of which can be seen today in the church of Pont de C .

Although the largest French cathedrals and major abbey-churches have been at pains to preserve their stalls, many of these small wooden art works have nonetheless disappeared either because of various problems (war, arson, fire, etc.) or because they were deliberately destroyed or dispersed, or used as firewood.

History has been cruel toward late-medieval canonical stalls; yet there are quite a few examples remaining, which date from the late fifteenth and (no hyphens needed if no noun follows "century" early sixteenth century. They have recently been the object of very detailed studies of which a prime example is a study devoted to the stalls of the cathedral of Amiens, in the north of France, which are the most recent and prestigious examples of it.³ On the whole, these canonical choirs do not seem to exemplify our present theme: Apostles and Sybils sculpted on the dorsals are hierarchical; they do not laugh, let alone smile.⁴ Biblical scenes are also found in abundance; they, too, are full of *gravitas*, as they depict the whole Creation in a devotional procession. However, in spite of all this, we can find a few discordant and humorous elements: the misericords, the support hands, and the parcloes often include scenes from daily life, where husbands and wives quarrel, where animals imitate preachers, where obscene gestures create a visual shock and look incongruous in such a place.

The vocabulary of these images is well-known: the domestic quarrel with all its variations of fighting and humiliation, such as Aristotle carrying a prostitute on his back; scenes with animals and, especially, monkeys, literally omnipresent on support-hands,⁵ but also genre scenes where the sculptor represents images fusing humans and animals in a mix of genres which is what people in the Middle Ages feared most. What may these decorative elements suggest given the sacred context

² Franck La Brasca "Utrum riserit Dantes," *De quelques formes du comique*, ed. Claudette Perrus. Arzana, 2 (Paris: Presses de la Sorbonne nouvelle, no. 2, 1994), 65–85.

³ Kristiane Lem -Hebuterne *Les Stalles de la cath drale Notre Dame d'Amiens* (Paris: Picard, 2008).

⁴ See, for example, the cathedral of Auch, or the cathedral of Saint Bertrand de Comminges in the South of France.

⁵ On monkeys in the Occidental world in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, see Horst Woldemar Janson, *Apes and Ape Lore in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*. Studies of the Warburg Institute, 20 (London: Warburg Institute, 1952).

in which they are present? The way medieval people envisaged laughter is well-known thanks to the many works of historians and literature specialists on that topic. From Jacques Le Goff to Sophie Menache and Jeannine Horowitz, occasions for laughter, its enactors, and the reactions to it have been studied, but most of these authors have turned hardly any attention to these dimly-lit, sometimes slightly laughable artifacts. Yet the latter can instruct us about the way medieval people visualized laughter or smiling.

However, they raise many difficult questions: considering that these stalls were the very place canons positioned their weary (sounds coarse) *derrieres*? , were they meant to be seen? Did canons themselves actually take a look at what they were resting on? This last question is less relevant for the non-hidden elements, like rest-hands and *parcloles*, but it is obviously very critical for *misericords*. Is there any kind of link between a canon and the sculpted *parclose*? That question is difficult to answer. Were wood-sculptors familiar with the canonical hierarchy and with the consequent sitting arrangement? Stalls were distributed according to a very hierarchical scheme with each canon assigned to a specific stall; changes in sitting arrangements, as well as moving toward the highly favored Western wing, were dependent on the relative promotion of canons within their chapter.

Given this state of affairs, therefore, it stands to reason that sculptors could not associate a specific image with a particular canon in mind, although it cannot be totally rejected. But given that stalls were made to last decades or hundreds of years, it is also unlikely that canons saw the construction of new stalls during their canonship. The association of an iconographic program with a specific person could shed a different light on the reasons for a particular choice and on laughter yet, at the present state of research, it is impossible to go further in that direction. The case of St Peter's Church, in Saumur, studied by Dorothy and Henry Kraus, shows that even if we have in-depth and detailed knowledge of the identity of patrons and artists, this cannot guarantee an identification of specific stalls with individual canons.⁶

Our corpus deals essentially with *misericords* and *parcloles*: but I will also deal with the few sculptures of monkeys in St. Jacques in Liège where the little animal seems to be reading and singing along with the canon(Fig. 1): Its parchment and its open mouth mimic openly to the gestures and positions of the canons during Mass. Janson has shown that since the fourteenth century, the figure of the monkey is used in imagery and in literature alike as a symbol of man's sinfulness, bringing together vice and luxury. Such a little monkey can make today's observer laugh, but behind the comic nature of its representation, it means to remind clerics of their condition as sinners and the necessity to pray. Placed besides the man, the

⁶ Dorothy and Henry Kraus, *The Hidden World of Misericords* (London: Joseph, 1975).

monkey echoes the sentence *ars simia naturae*, that is, art simulating nature, so the monkey is like man, but only "like" and not "equal to" man. The humorous aspect of anthropomorphizing a "choir monkey" gives smile a pedagogic dimension, just as the preacher used humor to indicate or suggest his message.⁷ Such a transgression conveys a tragic laughter but is totally in line with the most common tradition of medieval laughter as we know it from fabliaux and the whole of vernacular literature.

Transgression, ridicule and derision are the three key components characteristic of medieval laughter and the misericords in the stalls do not prove them wrong, as the study of a few of them will easily show.

There are many ways of staging ridicule in these misericords. It can be by animals that reflect human attitudes: In Saint Peter's Cathedral of Saint Claude, the fox preaches to a crowd of hens, which of course listen dutifully; the fox, its forelegs resting on the pulpit, looks as familiar as a cleric; likened to a group of hens, the crowd is depicted in a not-too-flattering (an unflattering?) way. By deriding preachers, the giving of sermons, and worshippers at the same, the artist reminds canons that preaching can be a vain thing; this is particularly relevant to the canon leaning on his misericord and who sometimes has to undergo a sermon of the Dean. In the same vein, the organ-playing pig, in Beauvais Cathedral, highlights a particularly praised human activity (Fig. 2) while obviously playing sacred music. The choice of a pig for the player debases both the activity and the one who is performing it. The transgression of the frontier between the realms of man and animal generates the ridicule; this happens throughout the entire Middle Ages, a time when people were fascinated but also frightened by all the possible interplay between the two realms.

This ridiculous situation was compounded by derision and obscenity: these silhouettes seem to bear the heavy load of the reclining man: the porters are very often depicted in the stalls. The Vend me Trinity displays a majestic porter with arms and legs fully spread out to carry the heavy weight of the canon (Fig. 3). That of St Peter's Church in Saumur, is more obscene and scatological: he seems to be smelling in a disapproving way the canon's behind (Fig. 4) what Dorothy Kraus has characterized as a Hellish stink. Yet we also have to consider the light? (humorous?) laughter by the one who sculpted it, if not by a possible viewer of the scene.

Theologians define *derisio* as a set of attitudes, either verbal or physical, trying to create shame in the ridiculed person.⁸ The canon who was attributed? assigned?

⁷ Jeanine Horowitz et Sophie Menache, *L'Humour en chaire, le rire dans l'Eglise m di vale* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1994).

⁸ Romain Telliez, "En Grand esclandre et vitup re de nostre majest , l'autorit  royale bafou e par

such a misericord could indeed chose to laugh about it, or to run from it and to eschew it out of shame or decency.

Transgression is everywhere to be observed in canonical stalls. First, there is the presence of women at the heart of the sacred part of the church, to which they have no access, owing to their status as laypersons and their gender. Indeed, women are often depicted, be it in standard human activities (they carry water in the Trinity of Vendôme), or in activities linked to their status as females. They are placed in the role of the temptress, or they may ridicule weaker men in domestic fights and graphically wear the pants (Rouen, Villefranche de Rouergue, to name but the most famous examples);⁹ the female bagpipe player and the contorting acrobat play an incongruous dance in such a respectable place. Their endless chatting is also caricatured, as at the Abbey of La Haye aux Bonhommes where a gossip woman, no doubt considered too talkative during the Holy service, has her lips padlocked (Fig. 5).

Their tempting youth is also a recurrent theme, as in Saint Bertrand de Comminges's austere choir, where a misericord depicts a young nymph, her clothes partly undone and showing her chest to an old satyr looking the other way. This scene is laughable because of its pathetic dimension, none of the protagonists looking joyful or smiling. Even the most dubious situations are made to conjure up traditional religious scenes: these abound in the stalls of Saint Bertrand de Comminges. Sometimes they are physically distorted, like the spectacular Matron of the Trinity, who marches everybody away, including the canons (Fig. 6) ; this imposing woman, her hands on her hips, is about to smile. But in Amiens, the canons are dancing towards on the pendants in front of them, a lady and two young prostitutes; one of them pulls up the petticoat of the other, revealing in a laughing gesture her naked body. Here, laughter is not as much that of the reader or of the spectator, but that of the subject, fully assuming and vindicating its life.

Nudity also prompts an awkward laughter; it is a frequent subject matter and does not only concern women. The ridiculous postures of male figures, the neatly shown nudity of buttocks, of legs, clearly testifies to a wish to ridicule the canon who was to sit on top of the misericord (Fig.7). Clothes are clearly delineated to draw a sharp contrast with the rest of the naked body and to mock his attire. Obscenity is masculine as well as feminine. The most striking example is that of the man in the Rodez Cathedral, with his totally obscene attire and his protruding anus on the wooden stall, in imitation of the canon's behind (Fig. 8); the cause of laughter is the perfect similarity between the caricature and its involuntary model.

le rire en France à la fin du moyen âge," *La dérision au moyen âge, de la pratique sociale au rituel politique*, ed. Elisabeth Crouzet-Pavant and Jacques Verger (Paris : PUPS, 2007), 241–60

⁹ See Pierre Bureau, "La Dispute pour la culotte, variations littéraires et iconographiques d'un thème profane XIIIe siècle–XVIe siècle," *Médiévales* 29 (1995): 105–29.

A similar display of rude behavior can be found in an almost identical image in the choir of St. Tugdual Church in Tr guier (Brittany): an acrobat spreads his bare legs and exposes his genitals in the foreground; even if they are not really visible, his posture leaves no doubt about the scene. That this indecent exposure was meant to bring out laughter cannot be doubted, because the acrobat is not totally bare, but only his legs emerge from a confused mass of clothes and headgear.

These few examples display the major characteristic of medieval laughter: bodily functions, the exuberance of flesh, and of food. But medieval laughter gives emphasis to natural cycles, to birth or re-birth, to life. It does not denigrate. There are of course problems of interpretation, and there is also the question of how these sculptures were perceived at the time.

Who observed them? The one who undoubtedly laughed when sculpting them? The canon who may or may not have seen them when sitting down on the choir stall? Can we imagine that the whole chapter first went throughout the stalls to discover them? This very thought makes us laugh, and this is probably a good result. Yet, as Bergson has stated, laughter addresses intelligence and is an echo of human rationality.¹⁰ Laughter is always a collective phenomenon and it implies some complicity between the members of a group, be it real or imaginary. There was without a doubt a relationship of this kind between the sculptor and the canons, but we cannot define it exactly.

More important, how can we account for the place of these misericords, of the laughter they generate, in such a sacred place as the heart of a church? Could humor be "this remedy which unnerves the people without beguiling them"?¹¹ Laughter in medieval churches has been thoroughly studied, but it may be useful to recall some essential elements about its place.¹² Derision can be a means of contesting authority, a way of challenging the power of the canons who order and pay for the stalls; there is indeed fun poked at them, but at the same time the sculptures are made in order not to be seen. Is there some kind of duplicity, and if so, between who and whom?

Under special circumstances, laughter is the voice of the voiceless insofar as laughter can be a weapon not only against stupidity and power, but also against

¹⁰ Henri Bergson, *Le Rire Essai sur la Signification du Comique* (Paris: Quadrige/PUF, 1995).

¹¹ Robert Escarpit, *L'Humour* (Paris: PUF Que Sais Je?, 1981).

¹² The list could be extended infinitely, but see Sophie M nache and Janine Horowitz, *L'Humour en chaire*; Jacques Le Goff, "Le rire dans les r gles monastiques du Haut Moyen Age," *Un autre Moyen Age* (Paris: Gallimard, 1977); see also Jacques le Goff, "Rire au Moyen Age," *Les Cahiers du Centre de Recherches Historiques* 3 (1989), here quoted from the online version at: <http://ccrh.revues.org/index2918.html> (last accessed on July 9, 2009); Jean Verdon, *Rire au Moyen Age* (Paris: Perrin, 2001); Georges Minois *Histoire du Rire et de la D rision* (Paris: Fayard, 2000); Albert Lecoy de la Marche, *Le Rire du Pr dicateur : R cits fac tieux du Moyen Age* (Paris: Brepols, 1992).

ensorship and intellectual terrorism. That weapon of the vulnerable and unarmed, held in its hands by the wood-sculptor is a timeless depository of the fantasies and frustrations of those who cannot bid for the central place in the church.

This laughter rings as an echo of the various *exempla* studied in sermons, which ridicule the overconfident bishop or the debauched cleric, by giving the old woman or the fooled peasant the verbal comfort which makes them laugh, but also provide them with food for thought and a sense of humility. In this respect is is much like the fabliaux?¹³ Laughter then is a conscious mechanism, consciously thought about, likely to give its creator considerable leverage over the one who tries to avoid the upsetting sculpture.¹⁴ This interpretation, maybe too dark because it sounds like the eternal fight of the humble against the too powerful cleric, may well have a grain of truth in it; it may however not ? conclude the question of laughter in medieval stalls.

The description once given by Vladimir Jankélévitch, for whom "Humor needs man to deride himself, so that when the idol is overturned, unveiled, exorcised, another idol does not take its place immediately,"¹⁵ is a solution. This is how self-deprecating humor comes close to spirituality; since it demystifies pretences and illusions, religious humor allows man not to take himself too seriously. It then might be a command from the canons, who would accept that their dignity be laughed at. This laughter would be of little consequence, since the very function of the misericord is to be unseen, either turned upwards in a dimly lit choir, or tucked under the canon's derriere? Or something more dignified. Laughter is then the instrument of a well-controlled humility, an antidote to that pride which clerics were always prone to, if the contemporary literature is to be believed. This reading has the advantage of giving the canon or the chapter an active part in this form of hidden humor. But as enticing as this idea can be, it likewise cannot explain our "laughing stalls" in a fully satisfactory fashion.

How could such a devout and religious society be at the same time so rife with examples of ridicule and obscenity, and this at its very spiritual core?¹⁶ The fact

¹³ See also the contributions to this volume by Jean E. Jost and Sarah Gordon.

¹⁴ Sophie Ménache and Janine Horowitz, *L'Humour en chaire*, 20

¹⁵ Vladimir Jankelevith, *Henri Bergson, Le Rire: Essai sur la signification du comique* (Paris : Quadrige 1989).

¹⁶ For a much broader and in-depth investigation of this question than can be offered here, see the contributions to *Sexuality in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Times: New Approaches to a Fundamental Cultural-Historical and Literary-Anthropological Theme*, ed. Albrecht Classen. *Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture*, 3 (Berlin and New York: Walter de

that the sacred and profane were not distinguished at this time may account for the seeming anomaly. The stall is only a marginal element in canonical space but it belongs fully to it. It also works as do those manuscript margins dear to Michael Camille, who viewed them as the necessary counterpoint to the deepest theological thinking. The Judeo-Christian world, in spite of St John Chrysostom's declaration, is not alien to laughter; the Bible is full of roars of laughter, from Sara's when she becomes Isaac's ("the laughing one") mother, to the Virgin singing the Magnificat.¹⁷ Laughter is linked, or chained, to faith, and Saint Bernard himself, the epitome of austerity, presents himself as *joculator dei*. In the *Divine Comedy*, laughter is very much mapped out: it is forbidden in Hell; in the Purgatory, penance and laughter seem mutually exclusive, while Paradise is full of smiles and laughter.¹⁸

It has no therapeutic value, and no rite is attached to it. In contrast to some ancient cults, it then has a place for itself.¹⁹ God's first answer from the whole of creation, as recalled by Job on his dung heap, is that all the Creation is God's own, as is transgression; and the medieval Church, by depicting ridiculous or wayward behaviors, encapsulates it in a total picture wherein a certain form of hidden humor stands side by side with Biblical, historical or evangelical characters. Biblical laughter is a dissonant one because it sets the scene for a paradoxical world, both profane and at the same time entirely sacred (nothing escapes God) and entirely given to Man for him to sanctify it.

Misericords were here to remind their august users their sanctifying function in a world sometimes regarded as contemptuous and frightening. The answer comes maybe from Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose*: he reminds us that the real function of laughter is to release Man from his fear of the Devil; to be set free from the fear of the Devil is sapience, because the Devil is arrogance of the mind²⁰. But if Man does no longer fear the Devil, shall he still fear God? The ambiguous nature of laughter displayed in these medieval stalls allowed the canons to take part in a long tradition of believers who did not fear to laugh, but did so at the risk of not having to fear the Devil. Dangerous!²¹

Gruyter, 2008).

¹⁷ See the Introduction to this volume by Albrecht Classen.

¹⁸ Th r se Bouch  and H l ne Charpentier (dir), *Le Rire au Moyen  ge dans la Litt rature et dans les Arts* Actes du colloque international novembre 1988, (Bordeaux: Presses Universitaires de Bordeaux, 1990), 137-46

¹⁹ Bernard Sarrazin, *Le Rire et le sacr * (Paris: DDB, 1991).

²⁰ Umberto Eco, *Le Nom de la rose* (Paris: Grasset, 1980), 185-92.

²¹ I would like to thank Prof. Jean E. Jost and Prof. Albrecht Classen for their editorial help with this article.



Figure 1: Saint Jacques de Liège



Figure 2: Beauvais Cathedral: Pig playing organ



Figure 3: Trinity of Vendôme



Figure 4: Saumur: St. Peter's church



Figure 5: Pont de Cé: gossipy woman



Figure 6: Trinity of Vendôme: The imposing woman



Figure 7: Chezal-Benoit abbey



Figure 8: Rodez Cathedral

Chapter 17

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Vox populi e voce professionis: Processus juris joco-serius. Esoteric Humor and the Incommensurability of Laughter

In 1611, the Protestant Swiss historian and indefatigable editor, Melchior Goldast von Haiminsfeld (1576–1635), published in Hanover a collection of medieval texts detailing fictional trials, which he entitled simply *Processus juris joco-serius*.¹ Included in the volume are the *Processus Sathane*, a *tractatus* dating in its original form to the first half of the fourteenth century, often attributed to Bartolo of Saxoferrato, an attribution questioned by Goldast himself, wherein Satan brings suit in the court of Christ for possession of humanity whose legal defense is undertaken by the Virgin Mary; and the *Processus Belial* or *Luciferi*, composed circa 1382 by Jacob de Theramo, Bishop of Spoleto, and better known as Palladini, wherein Satan brings suit in the court of Solomon against Christ for the despoiling of Hell, the defense being undertaken by Moses.

Some bibliographers have identified this collection with the second or third volume of Goldast's famous *Monarchia*,² assembling *opera* critical of papal pretensions to imperial power, others recognize the volume stands alone. In either case we may legitimately ask why an editor of serious political treatises, law codes,

¹ Generally cited simply as *Processus ioco-serius* (Hanover: Biermann, 1611), the full title appears as *Processus ioco-serius tam lectu festivus et iucundus quam ad usum fori et praxeos morales cognitionem utilis ac necessarius* (Hanoviae: Type villerianis impens. Conr. Biermanni et cons. MDCXI). The praefatio ad lectorem, addressed *Lectori Christiano et Benevolo S.P.*, is subscribed simply with Goldast's initials, M.G.H.

² *Monarchia Sancti Romani imperii sive tractatus de iurisdictione imperiali seu regia et pontificia seu sacerdotali, deque potestate imperatoris ac papae, cum distinctione utriusque regiminis, politici et ecclesiastici studio atque industria Melcioris Goldasti Haiminsfeldii, etc.*, 3 vols. (Hanover: Biermann, 1611–1614).

and legal commentary would trouble himself with such trivialities. A clue is provided by Goldast's preface, wherein he writes:

"Speculum tibi exhibeo, mi Lector, tenebrarum Romanarum, omnibus Chimeris et Aegyptiis magis obscuriorum, in quibus populus Christianus et olim palpitant et hodieque magnam partem caecultat et praestrictus tenetur."³

["I show you a mirror, reader, of the Romish shadows, with every chimera as well of the darkness of Egyptian arcane, in which once the Christian people trembled, and in which yet today, a great part, blinded, are held bound."]

For Goldast, then, a significant element of the humor of his collection is the derision with which he anticipates the reader will greet the superstitious medieval Roman Catholic cultural milieu of which the *opera* are *indicia*.⁴ In a sense, this characterization finds an echo in Aaron Gurevich's description of Bakhtin's "grotesque realism" or Frejdenberg's "vulgar realism" as in essence "vulgar, grotesque mysticism," an ambivalent, serious-humorous attitude toward the forces of evil that he describes as an essential manifestation of popular religiosity.⁵

A decade earlier, however, Goldast's fellow Germanist⁶, Doctor of Law and advocate in Nuremberg, Jakob A. Ayrrer (1543–1605), a generation older than Goldast and known today primarily as a dramatist, particularly through his comedies and festival-plays, had published an expanded version of Palladini's *Processus Luciferi* as an extended Roman-canonical law *ordo iudiciarum*, a sort of manual of trial procedure, bordering on the facetious.⁷ Indeed, he and Goldast seem to represent, respectively, Mikhail Bakhtin's later concept of the world of

³ *Processus ioco-serius*, Praefatio ad lectorem, 2r.

⁴ On Goldast's political and cultural sympathies, see Gundula Caspary, *Späthumanismus und Reichspatriotismus: Melchior Goldast und seine Editionen zur Reichsverfassungsgeschichte*. Formen der Erinnerung, 25 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006).

⁵ Aaron Gurevich, *Medieval Popular Culture: Problems of Belief and Perception*, trans. Janos M. Bak and Paul A. Hollingworth. Cambridge Studies in Oral and Literate Culture, 14 (1988; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press and Maison des Sciences de L'Homme, 1993), 193.

⁶ I use this term to indicate particularly those humanists whose attention was devoted significantly to the collection, cataloguing, and commenting upon documents of significance to the history, language, and literature of the German-speaking peoples. On Goldast's role in German philology as a collector and editor of early German texts, see Anne A. Baade, *Melchior Goldast von Haiminsfeld: Collector, Commentator and Editor*. Studies in Old Germanic Language and Literature, 2 (New York: Peter Lang, 1993). On Ayrrer, see Albrecht Classen, "Ayrrer, Jakob," Walther Killy, *Killy Literaturlexikon*, ed. Wilhelm Kühlmann, et al., 2nd ed. Completely revised, vol. 1 (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 2008), 276–77.

⁷ *Historischer Prozessus iuris, in welchem sich Lucifer über Christum, darum, dass dieser ihm die Hölle zerstöret, eingenommen die Gefangenen daraus erlöset, und hingegen ihn Lucifern gefangen und gebunden habe, beschweret. Darinn ein ganzer ordentlicher prozessus von Anfang der Citation bis auf das Endurtheit, in ersterer und anderer Instance, darzu die Form, wie in Compromissen gehandelt wird, einverleibet* (s.l. [Frankfurt]: Basse, 1597). See Carolus Ferdinand Hommel, *Litteratura iuris* (Leipzig: Wendlerus, 1761), 168–69.

humor in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries,⁸ the former himself an author partaking of carnival and folk-humor, the latter, an ideologue too content to compartmentalize, to cloister humor, and to discount it as trifle, if not blasphemous, bagatelle. Yet, felicitously, if but fortuitously, Goldast describes these works as *joco-serius* and filled with Chimera. There is no indication that Goldast appreciated comedy-drama as a genre with roots in Hellenistic *spondogeloin*, from the Greek *σπονδυέλαιον*, literally, “laughing-libation,” nor its Roman and medieval progeny adhering to the adage “ridendo dicere verum.” Granted this heritage was perhaps too readily accepted by Curtius⁹ as determinative given his formalistic perspective that viewed medieval literature generally as an extended inter-generational dialogue expressing human experience symbolically through an encoded-system dependent largely upon inherited topoi.¹⁰

Certainly, despite Goldast’s inclusion in the collection of *Ordannances sur le faict des masques* indicating that he may have at least comprehended the grotesque in terms of the early-modern carnivalesque, his prologue suggests a lack of appreciation for the chimerical, the grotesque that permeated not only comedy in the European Middle Ages, as argued by Bakhtin, but whose inversions¹¹, those juxtapositions of familiar dichotomies by which the world is essentially turned upside down, infested the literature and culture generally, as demonstrated by Gurevich and with which Ayrrer apparently felt no small affinity.

But was Ayrrer, who extensively revised and enlarged with a plethora of Latin glosses that rivaled those of the medieval glossators and commentators the

⁸ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (1966; Cambridge, MA.: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1968), especially Chapter One: “Rabelais in the History of Laughter.”

⁹ Ernst Robert Curtius, *Europäische Literatur und lateinisches Mittelalter* (Bern: A. Francke, 1948), translated as *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. Willard R. Trask. Bollingen Series, 36 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), particularly Excursus IV, 417–35.

¹⁰ See Scott L. Taylor, “Formalism,” in *Handbook of Medieval Studies*, ed. Albrecht Classen (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, forthcoming 2010).

¹¹ By inversions, I certainly wish to include the juxtaposition of high and low, sacred and profane, discussed by both Bakhtin and Gurevich, concerning which the latter writes “Is this not the ambivalent and paradoxical grotesque that combines so fantastically things and phenomena in direct opposition, material and spiritual, elevated and base, immobile and dynamic, inverting all established and customary notions of the tragic and the playful? Inverting them and restoring everything to its place. This grotesque does not destroy fear. Rather, it unites them in some contradictory feeling in which we are supposed to assume both sacred trepidation and merry laughter as an indissoluble pair. But the medieval grotesque is contained not only in the specific relation of laughter and fear. The most important thing is the paradoxical intimacy and confrontation of the earthly with the Other World, when each of these worlds is alien to the one opposing it. Medieval grotesque is not opposed to the sacred and does not retreat from it; it rather represents one of the forms of drawing near to the sacred. It simultaneously profanes the sacred and confirms it.” *Medieval Popular Culture*, 207–08. I also wish to include in this term the inverted metaphor, the grotesque result of saying B is like A, when conventionally A is compared to B.

German translation of Palladini's text—a text which by the height of the *Frühneuzeit* would have undoubtedly seemed either amusing or hopelessly stilted—correct in his assessment of Palladini's *Processus Luciferi* as in some sense *buffo*? Or was he too much the product of an age of Rabelais, of an urban age when carnival had reached its heights so that while relics of *loci commune* remain, they seem to have been reinvented, i.e., their original meaning having been lost in part or full, they are freed to be discovered anew and reinterpreted. In other words, does Ayrer make the same error that Gurevich¹² ascribes to Bakhtin in presuming the medieval grotesque to be necessarily humorous? While space does not permit us here to trace the entire lineage of these works, suffice it to say they are clearly and demonstrably descended from fictive debates between Satan and Jesus over the fate of humanity designed to illustrate the theological discourse concerning the nature of redemption and Christ's harrowing of Hell which emerged by the twelfth century, and which in the thirteenth century adopted a number of legal concepts from the civil and canon law, examples of which include the *Conflictus inter Deum et Diabolum*¹³ and the north Italian *Piaito ch'ebbi Dio con l'imico*.¹⁴ These works are not without passing humor, as were even hagiographies as noted by Curtius; but they are designed as serious theological analyses, not *iocundi*, and to overemphasize their comedic content is to read with Renaissance, not medieval eyes, as Gurevich insists.¹⁵

In the fourteenth century, however, we see emerge amid the legal literature and more particularly the treatises devoted to procedure, variously entitled *Ordines iudicarii* or *Libelli de ordine iudiciorum*, including fictive trials or *processus* apparently designed to demonstrate certain issues of procedural and substantive law, an imagined trial of humanity before Christ with the Virgin as defense counsel, which relies heavily on mime and the grotesque, borrowing heavily not only from the aforementioned dialogues but from the devotional literature portraying the

¹² The nature of the error perpetrated by Bakhtin is described by Gurevich in several passages: "Bakhtin opened up our view on medieval grotesque, but he erred, it seems to me, in interpreting it solely as comic grotesque," *Medieval Popular Culture*, 180, and again, "Bakhtin indicates the enormous significance of the grotesque in culture outside the church, in carnival and farce, but he reduced it to the principle of laughter and comedy. By contrast, my material suggests the hypothesis that the grotesque was a style of medieval man's thinking in general, embracing the entire culture, beginning from the lower, folkloric level and continuing up to the level of official church culture." *Medieval Popular Culture*, 208.

¹³ C. W. Marx, "An Edition and Study of the *Conflictus inter Deum et diabolum*," *Medium Aevum* 59 (1990): 16–40.

¹⁴ Franz Roediger, *Contrasti antichi: Christo e Satana*. Libreria Dante, Florence: Operette inedite o rare, 14 (Florence: Libreria Dante, 1887), 31–48.

¹⁵ See, e.g., *Medieval Popular Culture*, 184.

Virgin's intercessory role as well.¹⁶ The precise origins of the text are somewhat clouded, not only by the early as well as questionable attribution to Bartolus of Saxoferrato¹⁷, but also by the long recognized occurrence of the text in at least three distinct genera.¹⁸

The oldest of these, the Type 1, is always characterized by the incipit: "*Nostis fraters karissimi . . .*" While the explicits vary, the manuscripts typically conclude in the ultimate or penultimate sentence preceding the explicit, "*. . . cum renunciatur.*" At least four manuscripts of this type are known to exist, two dating to the fourteenth-century.¹⁹ It is this version that will be translated into low Norman verse by the middle of the fourteenth century as *l'Advocie des Nostre-Dame*. Type 2 manuscripts are easily distinguishable by the incipit: "*Accessit Ascaron* [variation, "*Mascaron*"]. This version, really an abridgement of the first, is found in at least two manuscripts, one probably early, the other clearly late

¹⁶ For a fuller discussion of the precedents of the *Processus*, see Scott L. Taylor, "Mary between God and the Devil: Jurisprudence, Theology and Satire in Bartolo of Saxoferrato's *Processus Sathane*," Ph.D. diss., University of Arizona, 2005, 58–101; see also note 20, *infra*. On post-Anselmic discourse concerning the devil's rights, particularly in England, see C. W. Marx, *The Devil's Rights and the Redemption in the Literature of Medieval England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); on the fate of Anselmic redemption theory generally, see Brian Patrick McGuire, "The history of Saint Anselm's theology of the redemption in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries," Ph.D. diss., Oxford, 1970.

¹⁷ Thomas Diplovatatus (1468–1541) was among the first to express doubt as to the provenance of the tract in his edition of Bartolo's work. Subsequently, Goldast in his 1611 edition and Fr. Roediger, *Contrasti Antichi*, 20–25, both questioned Bartolo's authorship. The objections raised by these scholars is not necessarily determinative, as I demonstrate in "Mary between God and the Devil," 33–39.

¹⁸ Johann August Roderich von Stintzing, *Geschichte der populären Literatur des römisch-kanonischen Rechts in Deutschland* (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1867), 262–71. Stintzing developed his taxonomy from analysis of incunabula, but my review of the manuscripts sustains his basic typology, though suggesting the possibility of identifying several sub-types. It should also be noted that those manuscripts as located in the archiepiscopal archive of Lucca by J. L. J. Van de Kamp, *Bartolus de Saxoferrato, 1313–1357: Leven, Werken, Involed, Beteekenis* (Amsterdam: H. J. Paris, 1936), are reported as missing.

¹⁹ The fourteenth-century manuscripts are Biblioteca Apostolica, Vaticana, lat. 2625 (174v–177v, and Bibliothèque nationale, Paris, lat. 10770 (189v–195v). Two early fifteenth-century manuscripts also exist: Universitäts-Bibliothek, Leipzig, Ms. 916 (335r–340r), and Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin, Ms. Lat. Fol. 862 (282rA–283rA). Incunabula and other early printed editions of this type include: (1) *Tractatus iudiciorum domini Bartholi legume doctoris famosissimi*, etc., s.l.e.a. (Colon); (2) *Modus legendi abbreviaturas* [sic] in utroque iure; *Tractatus iudiciorum Bartholi legume doctoris*; *Tractatus renuntiationum beneficiorum in publicis instrumentis*; *Processus Sathane infernalis contra genus humanum*; *Ars notariatus*. (Colonia: [Conr. De Zyrichzee, 1505]; (3) *Tractatus iudiciorum*; *Processus sathane contra genus humanum*. Parisius: Jehan Petit, s.a. [1510(?)]]; *Tractatus et processus diversi*. Basil. 1513, 1517; (5) *In utriusque iuris libros introductorium*; *tractatus et oricessus diversi utriusque iuris studiosis plurimum accomodati*. Basil, 1514. See generally, Scott L. Taylor, "Mary between God and the Devil."

fifteenth century.²⁰ The last version, Type 3, represents a significant redaction of the first type, and is easily distinguishable because the explicit is preceded by a fictional jurat, or affidavit, attesting to the accuracy of the report of the record and judgment in the case and undoubtedly intended as humorous since witnesses to the procuration include Cerebus. I have been able to identify only one manuscript of this *type*, and that of the fifteenth century.²¹ As it happens, this latter version is the text chosen by Goldast, probably because of its general familiarity, having been translated by Ulrich Tenngler circa 1493.

Despite the number of variants, the basic plot is more or less the same for all, warranting synopsis taken largely from Type 1 manuscripts and incunabula:

Following a brief recounting of humanity's fall, in an excursus excised in those texts with the introit "Accessit Mascaron [Ascaron]," the tableau joins in progress Satan's ongoing efforts to lead the human race back into its allegedly pristine estate of servitude to him. In council, the denizens of Hell determine that the best course for asserting their alleged "rights" is to appoint one particularly astute demon as procurator to bring a petition before the judgment seat of Christ. Armed with his letters, the infernal lawyer proceeds to the court of Christ, where having submitted his briefs, he seeks issuance of a citation commanding humankind to respond on a date certain, and requesting that the process be returnable on the day after the morrow. Christ rejects this maneuver, reminding the lawyer from hell that where there is no agreement on a date for appearance, and the defendant is a long way from the Court where he is to appear, it rests with the discretion of the court to set a date giving the party summonsed adequate time to appear and defend. He therefore sets the date for Good Friday following, to which the demon objects that business transacted on such a day would not be recognized as lawful. Christ, however, reminds him that this is legislative enactment, and since he made the law, he may depart from of dispense with it.

The attorney for Satan appears on the day set, and despite his best efforts to have his matter called, is kept waiting until sundown. With the case at bar and no

²⁰ Vatican, Ross, lat. 1124 (129r–135r); Collegio di Spagna, Bologna 126 (189r–195r). Printed versions include: (1) *Processus iudiciarius: accessit Mascaron ad Dei omnipotentis praeseciam*. s.l.e.a. {Augsburg: Gunther Ziner, before 5 June 1473}; *Libellus procuratoris in quo dyabolus producit litem coram iudice omnipotente deo contra genus humanum, pro quo beata virgo Maria tanquam procuratrix et advocate comparens tandem pugnam obtinuit et inimici versuciam confudit. Venetiis per Gerardum de Flandria*. 1478.

²¹ Universitäts-Bibliothek, Leipzig, Cod. Haen. 15 (129v–135v). Incunabula include: (1) *Incipit Bartoli legume doctoris processus contemplativus questionis ventilate coram domino nostro hiesu christo*, etc. s.l.e.a.; (2) *Incipit tractatus questionis ventilate coram domino nostro Jesu christo* etc. s.l. 1473. The peculiar juxtaposition of various elaborations on the text caused at least one scholar to hypothesize that this redaction was a composite of two different texts which a subsequent compiler failed to reconcile. Frederick Carl von Savigny, *Geschichte des römischen Rechts im Mittelalter*, 2nd ed., 6 vols. (Heidelberg: Mohr, 1834–1851), VI: 180.

one appearing on behalf of defendant humanity, the demon maintains that humankind has been proven contumacious. When Christ reminds him that judgments of excommunication should not be hastily issued, the procurator demands that the defendant's default be perpetuated in writing. Despite the demon's laments on the decline of justice, Christ determines that it is within his equitable jurisdiction to continue the matter. Meanwhile, a great lament goes up throughout heaven as to the fate of humanity if no representation be found.

These occurrences reach the ears of the Virgin Mary, and at the hearing the next day, when the demon lawyer seeks his default, Mary asserts herself as advocate for humankind. The plaintiff's attorney strenuously objects, first based upon Mary's relationship to the judge, and second, because women are barred from the office of advocacy. But Mary cites the plenitude of exceptions contained with the Decrees, the Decretals, and the Pandects, alleging that her maternal relationship to humanity, as well as her own human lineage, justifies her representation of the class. As Mary reminds her son, "Nostris bene fili tres fore ordines in mundo coniugatorum. virginum. et continentium ego enim fui de omni ordine" (Cologne, 1505: C3r; "You well know, my son, that three states are ordained in the world—married, virgin, and continent—and that I belonged to every status.")

Be that as it may, responds the demon, he is entitled to immediate interlocutory relief in the form of a return to peaceful and quiet possession of his spoliated property, namely humankind, pursuant to the decretals on restitution, which excludes the defendant's right to be heard. Nonsense, says Mary, for restitution ought not be made to those in possession by force, fraud or precaria, but rather where good faith and clear title are demonstrated; and Satan never possessed humanity, but at most served as God's jailer and held those in the infernal prison as Christ's custodian; hence, never did he hold by good faith or prescriptive right. Rather, Satan's claim derives from the devil's wrongful detention of humankind in death's dark dungeon, whence restitution will not lie.

"Not true!" says the demon. He alleges to have acquired the decree of a prior which would entitle him to possession, and proceeds to read from Genesis and the story of the Fall. Retorts Mary, "Allegavit enim caput et caudam subricuit quod est contra legem!" (Cologne, 1505: C3v; "Now he has raised head and lifted tail contrary to law!")—literally, he has alleged the head and raised the tail which is contrary to law, the phrase actually referring to arguing premises from conclusions. However, it also provides a vivid and amusing portrait of our demon procurator's posture.] She proceeds to allege Satan's complicity in the Fall by telling Adam and Eve not that they "would surely die," but only that they "would have knowledge of good and evil like God." On account of that fraud, he should bear the loss. But the demon counters that according to legal principle, humankind must be punished *officio iudicis*, on account of justice and equity, lest crime go unpunished:

“... imploro tamen vestrum nobile officium, Domine iudex, quod etiam parte tacente ex meto iudicantis officio procedere potest, ne crimina remaneant impunita . . . et de hoc dico motus aequo et bono indicio . . . Ad hoc enim ut scitis, pro necessitate tenetur quilibet bonus iudex . . . et nulli parcere debet . . . (Processus ioco-serius, 19–20)

[“... nevertheless, I appeal to your noble office, Lord judge, that even a party silent from fear of judgment is able to proceed based upon this duty, lest misdeeds go unpunished, and upon this principle and on good evidence I so move—and as you know, every good judge is necessarily bound to this duty, and it should be denied to none.”]

Mary immediately notes that the demon had his choice of remedies and was now attempting to change his cause of action. Furthermore, where there is recourse to ordinary procedures, a party is not entitled to rely on extraordinary relief. Satan seeks restitution, an ordinary remedy, based upon a private interlocutory order from which there was no appeal. Thus, the demon's demands transcend the *res judicata*, necessitating the dismissal of his entire case.

At this point, to emphasize her argument further, Mary, with tears streaming from her eyes, resorts to pathos, falling on her knees, and tearing open her robes to expose her breasts, reminding Christ of his filial obligations: “. . . flexis genibus scissis ab ubere vestibis lachrimis oculos mundantibus alloquitur filium . . . ” (Cologne, 1505: C4r; “on bended knees, with her robes torn from her breast, with eyes welled-up with tears, she speaks to her son. . .”). But Satan suggests that flesh and blood cannot reveal the truth of his claim, a perhaps snide comment on the Virgin's state *nuda ubera*, but rather points the judge to those passages of scripture which denominate Satan the lord of this world, and demands that Christ not nullify the scriptures. He then proposes that an accord be entered dividing humanity into the good and the evil, and Christ will be lord of the good, and he, lord of the wicked. Christ is about to assent, when the Virgin interjects that this distribution had already been considered when her son was on the cross and descended into Hell, and led out its captives, and no appeal had been taken then. The demon, however, insists that his proposed scrutiny of the human race is justified, first by the examples of the fallen angels, who though having no precept, were condemned *ad infinitum*, and second, by God's own commandment to Adam and Eve.

Mary responds, however, that the angels required no precept, for their knowledge was inherent, and therefore they sinned knowingly. Humanity, however, is infirm, and infirmity rather than malice, was the cause of its sin. Thus humankind requires definite precepts. Besides lacking the certainty inherent in the angels, humans are weighed down in nature by the body. Hence, in the person of Eve, humankind responded to Satan in the garden only “perhaps we shall die.” Besides, why did Satan not seek an interlocutory order at the outset? The fact remains, however, according to Satan, that mankind has sinned. But, insists Mary,

the demon reasons from false premises. He has distorted his version of the origins of the dispute, and therefore, all his conclusions are necessarily to be rejected. He should not even be heard in the courts of heaven. To this, the demon offers to leave, and let it be seen what type justice heaven offers. The judge, concerned with preserving the natural rights even of Satan, cautions his mother to allow the demon his say, though the two attorneys continue their personal attacks and counter-charges.

Finally, Mary advances the irrefutable argument that whereas God created humankind to be the heir to life eternal, as promised to Abraham and Sarah, if humanity were to be condemned entirely, it would mean that God had created the genus in vain. (Some versions of the text end at this point, basing their argument on the inviolability of contracts.) "But," says the demon, "either all things were wisely created, or the demons themselves were unjustly condemned. Not so, according to Mary, for if an entire chorus of angels were to be condemned, nine more would remain, whereas humanity itself could not logically be condemned without offense to the omniscience of God. With this final point, judgment is entered dismissing the complaint and the demon, disgraced, is sent packing his papers back to hell: "Et expulsus et ciccus est demon a celesti militia rediens unde venit et portans de sui procuracione dedecus et non decus (Cologne, 1505: C7r; "And the demon, worthless, is expelled by the heavenly host, returning whence he came, carrying his procuracion with him, disgraced and not distinguished.")

Although the modern reader is struck immediately by what seems the transparent playfulness of the foregoing tale, a standard of humor certainly to be cautioned against,²² it cannot be over-emphasized that the text was treated by its readers or hearers quite seriously as an exercise and primer in legal procedure. Beginning with the oldest manuscripts, hardly a phrase was denied extensive gloss with citations to the Roman and canon law. The more difficult question is whether contemporaries found this tale amusing as well as enlightening. Aside from its distribution, and its translation into the vernacular, a few medieval manuscripts provide a clue, describing the work, for example, as "*delectabilis*."²³ Even the fourteenth-century manuscript located by Robert Jacquin²⁴ bearing the description of "*Opusculum puerile*," which he interpreted to signify a student exercise, probably should be translated as "an exercise in boyish humor," else why transcribe it, let

²² As John W. Baldwin has commented: "Although I have frequently found myself laughing at passages in Jean Renart or the fabliaux, I have refrained from signaling elements of humor because I can never be assured that I share a sense of the comic with medieval audiences." *The Language of Sex: Five Voices from Northern France around 1200* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994), xxvii.

²³ Lat. 2625, Vatican City, Biblioteca apostolic, 174v–177v.

²⁴ Bibliothèque nationale, Paris, lat. 10770 (189v–195v); Robert Jacquin, "Le 'Procès de Satan'," *Bartolo da Sassoferrato. Studi e documenti per il VI centenario*, 2 vols. (Milan: Università degli Studi di Perugia, 1962), 2:270–90.

alone annotate it. But if it was humorous to its original audience of lawyers, why so? Granted, only such an audience could fully appreciate the sophistication of the legal arguments and the quality of the plethora of citations accompanying the text.²⁵

Indeed, it is the quality, the authenticity of the legal argumentation that transcends simple pastiche into mimesis. But this mime is inherently grotesque, because it is inverted. That is, the original idea of Christ and Satan at bar was to illuminate the metaphysical aspects of the redemption, to provide a model by which to understand, rather than explain, salvation. When the model is subsequently reclaimed to uncover further insights into the original, the paradigm is analyzed as though it were the original, and, ultimately accepted as a template for the original, it exhibits a circular metaphorical substitution, not just a displacement. Christ is not like a judge; he is the judge. Mary is not like the advocate, but she is the advocate which other advocates should emulate.

At the same time, there is a metaphorical loss, an ossification or reification, as Christ and Mary are reduced to mere types to understand the workings of the legal system. In the process, Jesus and the Virgin suffer loss of divinity and sanctity, respectively, as they are compelled to comport with their typology, i.e., act as real judges and real lawyers would act. In so doing, however, the piece engenders not only the humor of the “inside joke,” but engenders a sense of professional cohesion since, were Christ and Mary to perform our function, they, too, would behave as we do.²⁶ It is the comforting laughter of self-recognition and self-satisfaction, as a set of old commonplaces are appropriated for a new, and here professional, didactic end.

By mid-fourteenth century, however, the *Processus* had undergone a transformation. Beginning at least with the low Norman poem, *L'Advocacie Nostre-*

²⁵ For a fuller discussion of the legal subtleties of the text, see Taylor, “Mary between God and the Devil,” 101–67.

²⁶ On the heuristic value of the *Processus* and its implications justifying, indeed lauding, the legal profession, see Scott L. Taylor, “Reason, Rhetoric, and Redemption: The Teaching of Law and the *Planctus Mariae* in the Late Middle Ages,” in *Medieval Education*, ed. Ronald B. Begley and Joseph W. Koterski, S.J. Fordham Series in Medieval Studies, 4 (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 68–79; on treatises dealing with procedure and attendant literary genres generally, see Linda Fowler-Magerl, *Ordines iudicarii et Libelli de ordine iudiciorum (From the Middle of the Twelfth to the End of the Fifteenth Century)*. Typologie des sources du moyen âge occidental, Fasc. 63 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1994). The nature of the *Processus Sathane* was taken for granted at least from the eighteenth century. See, e.g., M. Terrasson, *Mélanges d'histoire, de littérature, de jurisprudence littéraire, de critique, etc.* (Paris: Simon & fils, 1768), 161–72; Charles Aubertin, *Histoire de la Langue et de la Littérature Françaises au Moyen Age*, 2 vols. (Paris: Eugène Belin, 1876–1878), 2:476; R. Delachenal, *Histoire des avocats au parlement de Paris 1300–1600* (Paris: E. Plon, Nourrit & C^{ie}, 1885), 315–16; cf. Paul Vinogradoff, *Roman Law in Medieval Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1929), 128–30.

*Dame*²⁷, the *Processus* began to appear variously in poetry or prose, in Latin or in the vernacular, but devoid of legal citations and legal subtleties, and not infrequently with lengthy encomia to the Virgin Mary. These editions certainly were not intended for the same audiences as the original *Processus*, nor can the humor, if any, be identical to that of the original, the bulk of whose jest is opaque to all but the initiated. Neither can they be read as humorless, since if anything, the gestures and antics of both Satan and the Virgin are accentuated, giving more the feel of mime than the *Processus* itself, as the Virgin throws ever more virulent hissy-fits, and the demon procurator grumbles more openly and extensively on the state of justice when women can launch crying jags in court while parading their naked bosoms before the clerks. Indeed, with the accumulation of specious arguments, *ad hominem* (or, perhaps, *ad demonem*) vituperations, and breaches of courtroom etiquette, as so often in the grotesque literature of the Middle Ages, the demon procurator seems almost pitiful as he laments:

“Combien que pour voir me debate
 Et que mes résons soient justes,
 Tu me mesdis touzjors et fustes;
 Ne me chaut, fors que ne me touches;
 Tu tenches et dis ces reproaches;
 Tu pleures et plains et souspires,
 Tu sanglotes, tut te dessires;
 Tu monsters á ton filz ton ventre,
 Et tel pitié u cuer li entre
 Que tu par force l’amolies.
 Il prent á bon gré tes folies,
 Quant tu li monsters ta meméle;
 Tu le treiz si á ta cordéle
 Qu’il ne t’a pover d’escondire;
 Quant tu ris, il le convient rire;
 Quant tu pleures, il veut pleurer;
 Il te par veut trop hennourer.”²⁸

[“As much as I undertake to make my proofs / And that my cause be just, / You always slander and attack me; / It makes no difference to me, so long as you do not touch me; / You quarrel and hurl these rapproaches, / You cry, you whine, you sigh, / You sob, you fall to pieces; / You exhibit your bosom to your son, / And such pity enters his heart, / That you compel him to weaken. / He willingly accepts your lunacy, / When you show him your breast; / You drag him so to your side, / That he is unable to deny you anything. / When you laugh, it suits him to laugh, / When you cry, he wishes to cry. / He would honor you way too much.”]

²⁷ *L’Advocacie Nostre-Dame et la Chapelerie Nostre-Dame de Baiex*, ed. Gaston Raynaud (Paris: Académie des Bibliophiles, 1869).

²⁸ *L’Advocacie Nostre-Dame*, ll. 2252–68.

With such antics, little wonder that reviewing some of the editions, Charles Ferdinand Hommel could conclude in the eighteenth century:

“Nemo enim poterat, etiamsi studiose vellet, causam generis humani miserabilius tueri, quam patrona huius causae Virgo Maria facit, utpote quae meris falsis argumentationibus et cavillationibus a demonio refellendis utitur, ut causa diabolic multo iustior appareat.”²⁹

[“Indeed, no one could defend the cause of humanity more miserably, even if he tried, than does the Virgin Mary as counsel in the case, insofar as she employs purely false arguments and sophistry, refuted by the demon, so that the cause of the Devil appears much more just.”]

But while there is by the fourteenth century a great deal of satirical humor designed to hold the legal profession and courtroom antics in ridicule, the Virgin’s participation in the legal spectacle would seem to militate against simple and superficial mockery of either advocates or the legal system.

Yet the humor appears directed in significant part toward the legal vocation, and against the backdrop of prior humorous criticism of that profession it seems to work. For centuries prior to the *Processus*, the legal profession was condemned, not remarkably, not merely for cupidity, but for its meretriciousness, the willingness, like prostitutes, to do anything for money.³⁰ It is for this reason they, along with actors, were frequently described as “effeminate.” Mary’s histrionics, however, are an act of self-revelation, an exercise in truth-telling. Mary is ultimately persuasive not because she blurs the lines between rhetoric and theatrics, as some have suggested, but because her gestures in a very important sense are not theatrics at all. Perhaps this becomes clearer if we consider for a moment a passage from Rousseau’s Letter to d’Alembert, discussed by Derrida in his theory of writing:

“The orator and the preacher, it could be said, make use of their persons as does the actor. The difference is, however, very great. When the orator appears in public, it is to speak and not to show himself off. He represents only himself: he fills only his own proper role, speaks only in his own name, says, or ought to say, only what he thinks; the man and the role being the same, he is in his place; he is in the situation of any citizen who fulfills the functions of his estate. But an actor on the stage, displaying other sentiments than his own, saying only what he is made to say, often representing a chimerical being, annihilates himself, as it were, and is lost in his hero. And in the forgetting of the man, if something remains of him, it is used as the plaything of the spectators.”³¹

²⁹ *Litteratur iuris*, 2nd ed., and quoted in Jacquin, “Le ‘Procès,’” 276. The first edition of 1761, however, was not so hostile, and in any event demonstrates that Hommel’s concern was with the Goldast text, largely because of his real focus on Ayrrer’s *historischer Prozessus juris*.

³⁰ See Taylor, “Mary Between God and the Devil,” 185–93.

³¹ *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1976), 305.

In the *Processus*, however, there is no alienation of representer from represented, nor emptying of the representer of self. When Mary speaks for humanity, she speaks in her own voice; she is one with the represented, a point emphasized in her arguments to undertake humanity's representation in the first instance. Neither is there any alienation of performer from audience, for the audience is part of the humanity that Mary represents. Indeed, Mary's overwhelming sincerity points toward the falsity of lawyers in general, whose portrayal by insincere actors in subsequent comedies produces a sort of exemplary truth. Mary does not blur the distinction between genres; rather, she reclaims gesture for true rhetoric, rescuing it from the clutches of theatricism.³² Neither do false advocates such as Msr. Pathelin, eponymous protagonist of the renowned fifteenth-century French satire, for theirs is manifestly theatrics, enunciated by a thespian for the derision or ridicule of the community. In this sense, the popularized versions of the *Processus Sathane* represent a precursor of both Basoche and carnival.³³

³² In this, I disagree with Jody Enders, *Rhetoric and the Origins of Medieval Drama*. Rhetoric & Society (Ithaca, NY, and London: Cornell University Press, 1992), 229: "And as she [Mary] blurs the gender lines between male and female, she also helps to blur the genre lines between rhetoric, dialogue, and drama. " Part of the problem stems from Ender's failure to recognize the Roman law origins of her vernacular text, another from her failure to account for the importance of *sinceritas* even in rhetoric. As I have argued elsewhere, the *Processus*, Latin and vernacular, presages Valla's standard of truth-telling in his *Repastinatio dialecticae et philosophiae*: "Nec ante very inquisition quam rei controversia nascitur. Itaque veritas est notitia rei controversae, falsitas vero eiusdem inscitia, quae est species prudentiae aut imprudentiae seu sapientiae aut insipientiae. Seu dicamus veritas est tum notitia animi de aliqua re, tum orationis ex notitia animi profecta signification. Nam orationem duobus modis accipi volo: uno an quis verum loquatur quum ita loquatur ut sentit, altero an quod sentit proloquatur, an diversum per simulationem dissimulationem. Ideoque duplex erit in oratione medacium, illud ex ignorantia, hoc ex militia, illud imprudentiae, hoc iniustitiae." ["There is no investigation of truth before a controversy concerning the matter is born. Hence truth is the knowledge of the matter of controversy, falsity indeed a lack of knowledge of the same, truth or falsity being a kind of prudence of imprudence, wisdom or folly. Or we say truth is on the one hand knowledge of the mind concerning some matter, on the other, the signification of speech derived from knowledge of the mind. For I wish speech to be judged in two ways: first, whether one speaks factually when he speaks as he feels; in the other, whether one declares what he feels or whether something different by simulation or dissimulation. And thus there will be a double kind of falsehood in speaking, the one out of ignorance, the other out of malice, the one imprudence, the other injustice."]

³³ Basochien since there is something of the confraternal professionalism inherent in that tradition, Basoche literally referring to the enactments of the clerks of the Palace of Justice—i.e., legal apprentices, some of whom would ultimately become advocates, most of whom would labor on eking out their existence as perpetual law clerks. Like so many confraternal associations, these clerks periodically presented farces or satires in a carnivalesque atmosphere, particularly during their heyday of 1450–1650. The tradition, however, is not limited to nor primarily rooted in the Basoche per se, but is indicative of the comedic traditions of other social and profession organizations as well such as *law Mere Folle de Dijon* also founded in the fourteenth century. In any event, the *Processus Sathane* undoubtedly predates Basoche per se. It is true that some scholars such as Enders follow Faber, *Les Clercs du Palais* (Lyon, 1875), in placing the foundation of the Basoche

Granted, in both professional and popular forms of this comedy-drama, we see at one level the medieval commonplace of the ambivalent demon, evil, dishonest, determined to grasp souls at any cost, and yet humorous, perhaps even pitiful at junctures. In this case, medieval *ioco-serius* as used by Goldast is an apt description. Yet these stories are not designed to promote Christian contemplation, veneration, or didactics. The original was designed as a heuristic device for teaching law, and the vehicle chosen is a humorous pastiche of pre-existing theological debates and Christian commonplaces portraying the Virgin as our advocate in heaven.³⁴ The popular version, on the other hand, while superficially closer in purpose to the *ioco-serius* literature detailed by Gurevich, also inverts the message of the original

itself in 1303, arguing that its purpose was to initiate apprentice lawyers before being permitted to practice before the *Parlement de Paris*. However, there was no *parlement* before 1309; nor does there seem to have been any organization of the bar until the reign of Philip Valois and the initiation of *Le Confraternite de St. Nicholas* (See *Ord. des Rois de France de la Troisième Race*, t. II, 176–78.) Indeed, both the timing and the devotion of the confraternity seems to have been dictated by a 1340 ordinance of Philip Valois, compelling all enrolled advocates of the *Parlement de Paris* to contribute one hundred sous to finance daily masses in the palace for the king and his family (Bibl. du Palais-Bourbon, *Collect. Lenain, Extraits du Parlement*, t. 237, f. 1–3, reproduced in R. Delechenal, *Histoire des avocats au parlement de Paris 1300–1600* (Paris: E. Plon, Nourrit, et cie, 1885), 408–10. It would seem odd if apprentice lawyers were organized before the lawyers themselves. Further, the clerks were largely “paralegal personnel” who nonetheless had official recognition according to an ordinance of 1345. *Ord. du Louvre*, t. ii, 225. No such recognition appears in the rather detailed letters of some 46 items issued by Philip in 1327 confirming the regulations that commissioners appointed by Charles le Bel had made for the reformation of the Chastelet de Paris. *Ord. des rois de France de la Troisième Race*, t. 11, 1–10. It seems unreasonable, therefore, to hypothesize anything like signification Basochien activity until the second half of the fourteenth century at earliest.

³⁴ For example, Mary’s role as advocate, opposed by Satan, is advanced in *Summa de laudibus Chrisiferae Virginis*, once attributed to Albertus Magnus, now generally thought to be the work of Richard of St. Laurence: “Item quod iura civilian et leges et decreta scivit in summon, probatur hoc modo. Sapientia advocate manifestatur in tribus: unum, quod obtineat omnia contra judicem iustum et spientem; secundo, quod contra adversarium astutum et sagacem; tertio, quod in causa desperata. Sed beatissima Virgo contra judicem sapientissimum, Dominum, contra adversarium callidissimum, diabolum, in causa nostra desperata sententiam optatam obtinuit” [“Likewise, that she (i.e., Mary) was unsurpassedly learned in the civil law and the statutes and decrees is demonstrated in this manner, for the wisdom of the advocate is manifest in three regards; first, that he obtains a favorable result before a wise and just judge; second, when confronted with a clever and adroit adversary; third, that he succeeds in a hopeless cause. But the most blessed Virgin, before the wisest of judges, the Lord, before the most determined of opponents, the devil, in our hopeless cause procured the best of verdicts”]. See M. A. Bethman-Hollweg, *Der Civilprozess des gemeinen Rechts in geschichtlicher Entwicklung* (Bonn: A. Markus, 1864–1874), VI, 245, note 54, quoted in Jacquin, “le Procès,” 275. Mary’s exhibition of her breast to Christ, paralleling Christ’s exhibition of his wounded side to the Father, is traceable to Arnaud Bonnaevallis in his *Libellus de laudibus B. Mariae Virginis*, Migne, P.L. 189: 1726 C–D, although Molanus in *De historia sacrorum* incorrectly attributed the topos to Bernard of Clairvaux. Certainly, the formula was standardized through the *Speculum humanae salvationis*, one of the most popular works of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, composed sometime between 1310 and 1324, and shortly translated into the major vernaculars.

Processus to describe victory not only over evil, but as much over what may have seemed the almost equally frightening intricacies of courts and lawyers. In essence, the comedic effect is provided by a double inversion, as the professional lesson is turned on its head, and not only does good triumph over evil, but sincerity triumphs over jurisprudence.

Were the *Processus Luciferi* simply an extended redaction of the popular version of the *Processus Sathane*, an assessment of comedic content by Ay rer, and the theory of Bakhtin concerning laughter as reaction to and mitigation of medieval fears, might seem apposite. Even if Ay rer were in earnest as to the heuristic value of his labors as a procedural tract, as the seventeenth-century canonist Ahasuerus Fritsch apparently believed, who added further *observationes* to those of Ay rer³⁵, his *Processus* would have represented a return to the original purpose and humor of the Commentators and their progeny. In fact, though it is almost unquestionable that the *Processus Sathane* inspired the *Luciferi*, the *Luciferi* is really a lengthy devotional work on the *consolatio peccatorum*.³⁶ As such, it is squarely within that literature discussed by and subject to the caveats of Gurevich. Its grotesque character is a vehicle not for humor but for instilling doctrine, and in many respects represents Palladini's reappropriation of the original dialogue which jurists had used as the basis for an *ordo iudicarius*. From this standpoint, Ay rer's sixteenth-century approach to the fourteenth-century *Processus Luciferi* of Jacob de Theramo, who was himself returning to twelfth- and thirteenth-century models, is anachronistic because he reads it in a manner more appropriate to the earlier *Processus Sathane*, i.e., as a playful vignette providing an opportunity to display wit and erudition.

Complicating the issue further, and transcending the scope of this little essay, it would be possible to analyze the various families and even traditions of the *Processus Sathane* to indicate revisions seemingly intended either to increase humor, legal sophistication, or orthodoxy, depending upon the audience for whom the text was intended.³⁷ For example, a number of the manuscripts and early printed editions either excise completely or at least minimize Mary's breast-

³⁵ Indeed, Fritsch notes, "Quoniam universus iste Tractatus Ay rerianus agit de processu Iudicario rite formando, ad obtinendam facilius ab adverse parte victoriam, operae precium erit pro majori luce nonnula de Iudicio." [Since as a whole Ay rer's treatise undertakes from properly conceived legal procedure to achieve more easily success over an adverse party, the value of the work will be to better illustrate aspects of a trial.] *historischer Processus Juris* (Frankfurt a. M.: Johann Melchior Bencard, 1691), 9.

³⁶ See Roderich Stintzing, *Geschichte der populären Literatur des römisch-kanonischen Rechts in Deutschland*, 273–75; Gustav Roskoff, *Geschichte des Teufels: eine kulturhistorische Satanologie von den Anfängen bis ins 18. Jahrhundert* (1869; Stuttgart: Parkland, 1993), 286–87.

³⁷ See Taylor, "Mary Between God and the Devil," in which I argue that the third family is an effort in the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century to excise certain arguably objectionable passages; on the genera generally, see Stintzing, *Geschichte der populären Literatur*, 262–71; cf. J. L. J. van de Kamp, *Bartolus de Saxoferrato, 1313–1357: Leven, Werken, Involloed, Beteekenis*, 72, et seq.

baring sequence, apparently feeling the original gesture too suggestive or demeaning. Some versions of the text terminate the *allegationes* with the argument founded on God's *pactum* or self-limitation, rather than upon any principle of necessity, the principle of self-limitation of the sovereign being dear not only to Franciscans in the theological realm, but to Bartolus in the legal.³⁸

I would suggest that what should be gleaned from this exercise is that the very polyvocality of the European Middle Ages, as well as its formalistic tendency to borrow extant configurations even for unconventional usages, makes the discernment of humor particularly difficult without ascertaining the purpose of the text and, perhaps more importantly, the segment of society for whom the text is intended. The study of the *Processus Sathane*, for example, suggests that the same vignette traveled from the realm of theological discourse, where it may have engendered smiles of understanding at God's miraculous plan of salvation, to the corpus of legal procedural literature, there evoking the laughter, if not smirks, of professional camaraderie, thence to the great public forum, where it was greeted with gleeful laughter not with, but at, the lawyers, only to return to its devotional origins in the *Processus Luciferi*.

Hence, the alterity that results in incommensurability proves an obstacle not only between epochs but between social groupings as well, and perhaps nowhere more than in the realm of humor. In the last analysis, the only constant is the cardinal rule for every historian as well as every comedian: know your audience.

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See Comment. On Codex, 1.14.4 (*Digna vox*); Cecil N. Sidney Woolf, *Bartolus of Sassoferrato: His position in the History of Medieval Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1913), 29, *et seq.*; on the history of the legal principle, see Kenneth Pennington, *The Prince and the Law 1200–1600* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 125–28.

Chapter 18

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“So I thought as I Stood, To Mirth Us Among”: The Function of Laughter in *The Second Shepherds’ Play*

Approaches to humor in literary texts have ranged across a very wide spectrum. Early criticism, especially medieval, often interpreted expressions of laughter and moments of humor as a break with decorum. Laughter could be considered both undignified and inappropriate for the noble and for the clergy, especially for and among the monastic orders. Laughter was both irreverent and threatening to serious, divine matters and civil authority. Laughter might be seen as a sign of frivolity and dissolution when a Christian should otherwise be in contemplation of the state of his soul. Thus, in its derisive form, laughter was appropriate only as a rejection of unChristian behaviors that would otherwise endanger the immortal soul. In contrast, the Aristotelian view, rediscovered by later Renaissance scholars but nevertheless incorporated into early medieval thought, would argue that it is laughter that makes us human.¹ This idea is supported in subsequent works by Quintilian, Marcianus Capella, Boëthius, and Alcuin of York, among others.² Indeed, as Connie Scarborough demonstrates in her essay earlier in this volume, the mixture of the comedic profane and the sacred comes down in exegetical tradition from Horace, as exemplified by the *Cantigas de Santa Maria* composed in the court of Alfonso X King of Castile and Leon in the latter half of the thirteenth century.

¹ Andrew James Johnston, “The Exegetics of Laughter: The Religious Parody in Chaucer’s Miller’s Tale,” *A History of English Laughter: Laughter From Beowulf to Beckett and Beyond*. ed. Manfred Pfister. Internationale Forschungen zur allgemeinen und vergleichenden Literaturwissenschaft, 57 (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2002), 17.

² V. A. Kolve, *The Play Called Corpus Christ* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1966), 127.

More recent literary criticism seems to favor a Bakhtinian approach, reading laughter as an eruption of the carnivalesque, an expression of disorder and a challenge to social order by those constrained beneath and within it. Mikhail Bakhtin defines folk humor as occurring in three forms: "(1) Ritual spectacles: carnival pageants, comic shows of the marketplace; (2) Comic verbal compositions: parodies both oral and written, in Latin and in the vernacular; (3) Various genres of billingsgate: curses, oaths, popular blazons."³ During such popular performances, there is the creation of a dialogue between the voices of authority and the voices of disruption, or even subversion, including what Mark Burde describes as "the dialectic of identification versus alienation."⁴ The Corpus Christi plays would certainly qualify as a public ritual spectacle, much of which contains the performance of written parody, both of religious matter and political life. Bakhtin further explains, "But comic literature was infused with the carnival spirit and made wise use of carnival forms and images. It developed in the disguise of legalized carnival licentiousness and in most cases was systematically linked with such celebrations. Its laughter was both ambivalent and festive."⁵

From this perspective, a moment of laughter might express a challenge to social constraint, political or religious authority. Conversely, as Paul Strohm has argued, such an eruption can also be interpreted as an event sanctioned by authority, a small act of defiance that functions as a relief valve to stresses that would become truly dangerous if left unalleviated or unchecked.⁶ Fortunately, a number of medieval texts also suggest a middle ground, which allows us a view of medieval humor as both more sophisticated and more subtle than previous approaches may have perceived.⁷ The Wakefield *Seconda Pastorum*, or *The Second Shepherds' Play*,⁸

³ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*. trans Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984), 5.

⁴ See Michael Burde's essay, "The *Parodia sacra* Problem and Medieval Comic Studies," in the present volume.

⁵ Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 13.

⁶ Paul Strohm, *Hochon's Arrow: The Social Imagination of Fourteenth Century Texts* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 46. See also a critique of the application of Bakhtin's idea of carnival and the claim of a ubiquitous "culture of laughter," by Hans-Jürgen Diller, "Laughter in Medieval English Drama: A Critique of Modernizing and Historical Analyses," *Comparative Drama* (Spring-Summer 2002): 1–19; a discussion of the limitations of Bakhtin's theory as a product of his own life in Stalinist Russia by Aaron Gurevich in "Bakhtin and his Theory of Carnival," *A Cultural History of Humor: From Antiquity to the Present Day*, ed. Jan Bremmer and Herman Roodenberg (Malden, MA: Polity Press/Blackwell, 1997), 54–60; Chris Humphrey, *The Politics of Carnival: Festive Misrule in Medieval England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001; as well as Mark Burde's critique of "the dubious and problematic proposition that one can speak of a monolithic 'sacred,' especially as Bakhtin defines it" in the present volume.

⁷ I myself have found Bakhtin's ideas of dialogism and of the carnivalesque useful in approaching any number of literary and nonliterary texts. In many cases, it may be difficult if not impossible to determine clearly the winner of the debate over the function of carnival as social subversion

performed during the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, is one such text, extant in the manuscript Huntingdon Library MS HM1, which suggests the moment of laughter may be both transgressive and restorative.

The Second Shepherds' Play is one of the mystery plays performed for the Feast of Corpus Christi in the town of Wakefield in north-central England. The one thing I am struck by each time I teach *The Second Shepherds' Play* is how funny my students find it. Granted, they do find it more difficult at first to understand because of the unfamiliarity of the vernacular, even more challenging than Chaucer because it is written in a northern dialect. In those semesters when I have taken a more performative approach to the drama, having students act out *The Second Shepherds' Play* has had the effect of helping them understand because they must actively engage with the language and because they are asked to put actions and gestures to the words. Invariably, the performance becomes comedic as the students reproduce the physical, slapstick stage business and suddenly discover for themselves the humor in the wordplay and symbolic imagery that transposes the earthly and the sacred.⁹ *The Second Shepherds' Play* is one medieval text that still evokes laughter among audiences today.

Performed by community members during the day-long Feast of Corpus Christi, the play cycle reproduces for its audience the full biblical history they would have heard in church services throughout the year, from Adam and Eve, through Noah's Flood, to the Resurrection. The Wakefield cycle, written anonymously by an author referred to as "the Wakefield Master" and believed to have been a member of the clergy, was performed in segments by various guilds-men each year. Each guild played its part, so to speak, and took great pride in their performances. Sheila Lindenbaum explains that "medieval drama and ceremony was largely a collective enterprise—a communal ritual in which all took part and which gave diverse groups within the community a sense of unity and shared identity."¹⁰ *The Second Shepherds' Play* itself relocates the annunciation of Christ's nativity to the shepherds on the hillsides of medieval England. Amidst their complaints of the disordered world and mankind's daily suffering—from harsh winter weather, nagging wives (or lack thereof), and the predations of their social betters—the shepherds hesitantly welcome one of their community members to

versus social control. In that case, once we have identified the carnivalesque in a text or a moment, what next?

⁸ "The Wakefield Second Shepherds' Play," *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*. ed. Alfred David and James Simpson. 8th ed. (New York: W. W. Norton and Co, 2006), 407–34.

⁹ Similar figures of slapstick comedy emerge from a long tradition, as evidenced by John Alexander's essay in this volume on the Pickelhering.

¹⁰ Sheila Lindenbaum, "Rituals of exclusion: feasts and plays of the English religious fraternities," *Festive Drama: Papers from the Sixth Triennial Colloquium of the International Society for the Study of Medieval Theatre*, ed. Meg Twycross (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 54–65.

shelter with them for the night. This man, Mak, justifies their distrust of him by stealing away a young ram from the herd as the shepherds lay sleeping. When the shepherds, Coll, Gib, and Daw, confront Mak and his wife, Gill, about the theft, the couple perpetrates a deception, hiding the sheep in the cradle as if it were Gill's newborn infant.

From a comedic perspective, what ensues is classic slapstick: the knowing audience watches as the honest shepherds comment upon the unattractively long nose of the child—actually the sheep's snout—and the unpleasant odor emanating from the child—obviously *eau de mutton* masquerading as a dirty diaper. The shepherds are nevertheless deceived. It is only when they return to give the child gifts that they discover the trick. Their generosity, even in the leanest of times, leads to enlightenment.

From the perspective of Christian allegory, the shepherds stand for those biblical shepherds graced with the news of the birth of Christ as they tended their flocks. The disorder they complain about early on and the discordant song they sing are replaced at the end of the play by celestial harmony as the heavenly choir announces the birth of the Savior. The scene of the discovery of the stolen ram in the humble abode of Mak and Gill, afterward re-enacted as the discovery of the miraculous child in the humble stable in Bethlehem, becomes a parody of the Nativity.¹¹ This moment is also parodic of the Crucifixion itself, of the tableau of the sacrificial Lamb of God suspended between the two thieves upon the hill of Golgotha. The stolen ram, the object of a relatively gentle parody¹² of the Eucharist when Mak and Gill plan to serve him up for dinner, becomes the Christ child, the Lamb of God. On this more sophisticated level of comedy, the thieves Mak and Gill make frequent remarks that they plan to eat the sheep, in a profane version of the Eucharist.

The element of Bakhtin's carnivalesque in the play comes at this moment, first as the tableau of the Nativity is played out by the thief Mak, his all-too-fertile wife Gill, and the long-nosed, odoriferous stolen ram, and again when the audience recognizes that the Lamb of God was nearly desecrated by the earthly, all-too-human thieves, Mak and Gill. Were the audience to realize that they have seen the transubstantiation of the body of the Lamb into the body of the Savior, at this period in time hidden from common eyes by the choir or rood screen when performed in the Mass, they may have felt an even greater sense of transgression. The trick, of course, is on thieves Mak and Gil, who not only fail to obtain their ill-

¹¹ For a discussion of the doubling used throughout *The Second Shepherds' Play*, specifically in the Townley cycle, see Warren Edminster, "Punning and Political Parody in *The Second Shepherd's Play*," *English Language Note*, 40.4 (June 2003): 1–11.

¹² I describe this as "gentle parody" in consideration of the more violent scenes portrayed later in the cycle, such as *Magnus Herodes* and *Coliphizacio*.

gotten dinner—as well, we should assume, communion through the Eucharist—but who also are not graced with the Annunciation as the shepherds Col, Gib, and Daw.

V. A. Kolve's seminal work on the Corpus Christi play cycle contextualizes the drama cycle as "play," specifically as a game, using examples from contemporary vernacular texts. Kolve demonstrates that "[t]hen, as now, play or game could describe children's pastimes, adult sports, and elaborate jokes alike: elements of pleasure, diversion, or gratuitous action are always involved. Both words are used as antonyms of 'serious'."¹³ At the same time, the Corpus Christi drama presents material quite serious in content to the medieval community because, as Kolve explains, it imaged "sacred personae of the highest importance to man, and it sought to instruct in matters central to the salvation of souls."¹⁴ *The Second Shepherds' Play* combines the sacred and profane, the awe-inspiring and the laughable. As Warren Edminster argues,

the festive currents do not completely repudiate the serious message of the play. In both plays [*First and Second Shepherds' Plays*], the atmosphere changes as the nativity approaches. All parody and folly end, and irreverence is muted. Indeed, both plays are sharply divided into sections of initial festive parody and subsequent serious reverence. None of the other plays contain this sharp separation, which suggests the plays are intended to distinguish between objects of folly and objects of reverence . . . This division between the initial festive parody and the subsequent serious reverence indicates that while the play mocks the shepherds of the Orthodox Church, they do not mock Christ.¹⁵

It is this combination and incongruity,¹⁶ this mixture of the serious and the playful, that occasions the laughter within *The Second Shepherds' Play* and then by its audience.

But, to what end? Was the laughter of the festive moment successful in challenging ecclesiastical and religious authority even as the serious moment instructed? If the Corpus Christi play cycle was intended by the Church and community to entertain and instruct during the Feast of Corpus Christi, how could the conflicting gesture to challenge and disrupt coexist with more legitimate concerns?

If we take instead the insights to be gained from an interdisciplinary approach from sociological and anthropological methods, what we would find in the play is not so much the threat of transgression and social upheaval, but of social

¹³ Kolve, *A Play Called Corpus Christi*, 17.

¹⁴ Kolve, *A Play Called Corpus Christi*, 20.

¹⁵ Warren Edminster, *The Preaching Fox: Festive Subversion in the Plays of the Wakefield Master* (New York and London: Routledge, 2005), 99.

¹⁶ This is what Edminster in his recent work, *The Preaching Fox*, identifies as the Bakhtinian dialogic.

inclusion and reconciliation. The study of humor has been of interest to psychologists, sociologists, historians, and anthropologists for some time. These fields have developed approaches to humor studies quite different from those developed by literary and language scholars. According to rhetoric scholar Tarez Graban in his review of interdisciplinary humor studies for use in the classroom, laughter can serve a number of functions: as a support for risk-taking behavior, for recognizing and reversing power structures, for challenging social order, for allaying fear and promoting dialogic resistance, for the promotion of critical thinking, and for building community and encouraging intellectual play or intervention.¹⁷ We can see examples of all of these in *The Second Shepherds' Play*.

Anthropologists studying the nature and function of humor, including Mahadev Apte and Mary Douglas, have stressed that laughter and humor in general is culturally-determined. As Albrecht Classen has discussed in his Introduction to this collection, what is funny is determined by the performative aspects of the speech or incident, and within the context of the specific situation, and often expresses the values of the laughing culture. That is, what is perceived as funny, and therefore able to generate laughter depends upon the *object* of laughter—which may be a thing, an event or a performer of the action or words—the interlocutor who laughs, those present who may overhear or witness the object, action or words, and the context consisting of time, place and location.¹⁸ An instance of laughter can best be understood from its contexts as defined by the social identities of those involved. A “laugh-act”—if I may borrow for a moment from the idea of the speech-act—or joke, “plucked out of the nuanced social context of its emergence often seems crude, nonsensical or, worse, just plain unfunny.”¹⁹ As outsiders to the community, outside in either location or time, we may be unable to understand the nature of the laughter if we are unable to understand the social context of the laugh-act. What an anthropological approach can tell us is what the joke says about the people who make it, how they make it and, more specifically, about the circumstances, be it social, historical, or gendered, in which they and their sense of humor are situated. Mary Douglas explains that the joke form rarely lies in the utterance alone, but that the humor can be

¹⁷ Tarez Samra Graban, “Beyond ‘Wit and Persuasion’: Rhetoric, Composition, and Humor,” *Primer of Humor Research*, ed. Victor Raskin (New York, NY: Mouton de Gruyter, 2008), 415.

¹⁸ Mary Douglas, “The Social Control of Cognition: Some Factors in Joke Perception,” *Man New Series* 3.3 (Sept 1968): 361–76; see <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2798875?cookieSet=1> (last accessed on Jan. 30, 2010); and Mahadev Apte, *Humor and Laughter: An Anthropological Approach* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 1985).

¹⁹ John Carty and Yasmine Musharbash, “You’ve Got to be Joking: Asserting the Analytical Value of Humour and laughter in Contemporary Anthropology,” *Anthropological Forum* 18.3 (Nov 2008): 209–17; here, 211.

We are made hand-tamed
 With these gentlery-men. (18–26)

He elaborates the source of his complaint, explaining that the gentry-men, representatives of wealthy landowners, cause the plows to be delayed in their tilling and borrow the wagons needed for harvest, often for purveyance. Despite their best intentions, they cannot till or harvest, and what they bring in is subject to taxation and rents to the landowner.²⁶ Coll's complaint serves to establish his social and class identity: working man, tenant farmer, soldier, as distinctly opposed to gentry.

The second shepherd, Gib, appears next, complaining, "these weathers are spiteous / And the winds full keen, / And the frosts so hideous / They water mine een, No lie" (83–87). The ill weather is the physical sign of the disordered, fallen world. His bemoaning of the weather turns then to the woe that results from marriage: "These men that are wed / Have not all their will / When they are full hard stead / They sigh full still Woe is him that is bun, / For he must abide" (105–08, 116–17). Gib's complaints establish his primary social identity as male, subjected to the domineering wife as a result of the disordered world.

The final shepherd, Daw, a young man in the employ of the older shepherd, Gib, continues the commentary on the weather with, "Was never sin Noah's flood / Such floods seen, / Winds and rains so rude / And storms so keen" (183–86). Daw's complaint continues as the familiar lament of the overworked, underfed, and underpaid employee. Though his employer is a fellow shepherd, he is nevertheless in a position understood by most of the medieval audience: few in society were free of the dictates of an employer, whether lord, landowner, merchant or the Church itself.

By their complaints, the shepherds signal that all is not right with the world: heaven itself rains misery both literally and figuratively upon poor men's heads. The disorder of the world that resulted from Mankind's disobedience is evidenced in the foul weather, but also in the social disorder: middlemen—very likely "new made" men—interfere with planting and harvest, to the ruin of the farmer and ultimately the community. Wives are disobedient and scold, another example of the world turned upside down. And even hardworking servants like Daw cannot be treated fairly, even by a master who is nevertheless feeling the same hardships and more likely to be sympathetic. These are the miseries common to all men of the laboring class. By presenting their troubles in this way, the characters establish amongst themselves, and with the audience, a common social identity and a reason for solidarity.

²⁶ The poor man's earnings were also subject to tithe by the Church and local parish, but this not the subject of Coll's complaint.

The seriousness of their distress is lightened by the entrance of Mak. While the shepherds are members of perhaps the most modest of all professions, Mak and his wife, Gill, are drawn from an even lower stratum. Mak describes himself as a man who “can get / More than they that swink and sweat / All the long day” by stealing (448–50). When Mak first approaches the shepherds on the hills, Daw complains, “Is he come? Then ilkane / Take heed to his thing” (289–90). Mak’s reputation as a thief and ne’er-do-well obviously precedes him. Foreshadowing the long, ill-shaped nose of the stolen sheep *cum* newborn infant to come, Gib complains of Mak, “thou has an ill nose / Of stealing sheep” (324–25). When Mak later returns home the first time, the stolen sheep tucked under his cloak, his wife Gill greets the knocking at the door with complaint:

Who makes such a din
This time of the night?
I am set for to spin;
I hope not I might
Rise a penny to win!

(427–31)

Working at home with a house full of children—for, as Mak laments, “Woe to him has many barns, / And thereto little bread” (566–67)—children whom she is unable to feed, Gill works long into the night at spinning. In reality, Mak and Gill would have been among those folk supported by the parish alms. They are the responsibility of the community, and yet that community seems not to have provided for its own. This is again a sign of the disordered world, when the Church community itself has failed in its obligations to its needy.

There is no question that Mak is a thief, preying upon his own community. Our censure of him is at first mitigated by the fact that he steals not for himself or out of greed, but to feed his hungry children. His first speech, like the others a complaint against the misery of life, ends, “Now would God I were in heaven, / For there weep no barns” (280–81). He approaches the other men identifying himself as “a man that walks on the moor / And has not all his will” (285–86). This is, in fact, the very complaint the others have made, though far more succinctly coming from Mak: they walk the moors as shepherds, despite the bitter cold, because farming work cannot support them. In actuality, then, though Mak plays the antagonist to the good shepherds, he has much in common with them.

The somber mood of the earlier speeches is lightened when Mak is discovered—Daw snatches his cloak away. Mak responds by acting like a stranger from the south, putting on a southern accent:

What! Ich be a yeoman,
I tell you, of the king,
The self and the same,
Sond from a great lording,

And sich.
 Fie on you! Goth hence
 Out of my presence:
 I must have reverence.
 Why, who be ich?

(291–99)

Mak attempts to appear as a stranger and a yeoman who works for the king, that is, someone who does not share social identity with the shepherds. He attempts to deny both his community ties (as a stranger from the south) and his class ties (as a yeoman). Coll's response to Mak, "Now take out that Southern tooth, / And set in a turd!" (311–12) expresses exactly what the shepherd thinks of Mak's false identity. To the audience, Mak's accented speech is the medieval equivalent of an ethnic joke. To the Wakefield populace, far from the prestige language of London and the political influence of the royal court, a man using a southern accent and putting on airs as "the king's yeoman" is likely to be a figure of fun, if not outright scorn. The fact that he is ordered to put his "tooth" — metaphorically, speech here that signals outsider identity — into a turd, would appear uproariously funny to the average audience member.

At this point in the play, my students have usually shifted from exaggerated melodrama of the shepherds' complaints to the swagger of the social braggart everyone loves to hate. The exhortation to put his tooth in a turd is usually met with laughter and cheers.

After Mak has absconded with the sheep, and returns to complete the deception, he lies down and waits for the shepherds to awake beside him. He is last to rouse, as if he has been asleep soundly all along. His first words are a complaint that his "neck has lain wrang" (449), as if in anticipation of the hangman's noose in his future. Before he goes, he asks the shepherds to search him: "I pray you look my sleeve, / That I steal nought" (570–01). These words have little significance to the shepherds, but to the knowing audience, Mak's audacity is another occasion for laughter. He is a Vice character, and a rascal you would want to see get away with the ruse.

Mak's arrival at his house with the stolen sheep allows us to see Gill, the harried wife, for the first time. Through Gill's complaints, the female audience members are incorporated into the communal social identity. Gill's complaints about having to spin well into the night, and being interrupted repeatedly so that she can get no work done (433–37) are a refrain likely to meet with a sympathetic ear among the farm wives, cottagers, and burghers' wives in the audience. The interaction between Mak and Gill itself is an occasion for laughter, beginning with his sarcastic comment that she left him standing at the door long enough — undoubtedly with the contraband sheep bulging from beneath his cloak, kicking and bleating as Mak struggles unsuccessfully to hide it. Gill herself is full of wise aphorisms, but brings both amusement and the threat of danger to the scene, as

she is the one to remind Mak, "By the naked neck / Art thou like to hing" (444–35) and "It were a foul blot / To be hanged for the case" (453–54). Mak will hang if he is discovered with the stolen sheep. With characteristic bravado and irony, Mak explains, "Thus it fell to my lot, / Gill, I had such grace" (451–52). He might as well have said, "I was just walking along, see? And this sheep jumped up into my pocket . . ."

Gill herself invents the idea to hide the sheep and deceive the shepherds who are likely on their way. We might recognize the ruse as another classic of comedy: the woman in labor, the image of the feminine transformed into a shrieking demon from hell, ready to murder the prospective father for getting her into this situation in the first place, if she could but get her hands on him.²⁷ In lieu of him, any male might do. Gill plays upon the custom that the period of lying in was woman's time, and men were wise to stay away. She groans, she shrieks. Ironically, she accuses the shepherds of intending to steal the newborn babe, itself the stolen sheep, thereby drawing attention to the very thing the shepherds seek, and in so doing, chasing them from it. When they continue to search for the meat they presume the sheep has become, Gill swears, "I pray to God so mild, / If ever I you beguiled, / That I eat this child / That lies in this cradill" (771–74). Gill does not lie by this oath: she has in fact beguiled them, and therefore, she fully intends to eat the sheep. What the poor shepherds hear, however, is a woman so crazed with labor pains that she is willing to eat her own offspring. Female audience members would laugh in appreciation of Gill's cleverness and men's folly. The male audience can laugh as the simple shepherds are deceived, perhaps convinced they themselves could never be so gullible, or perhaps admitting that they wouldn't dare the laboring woman's wrath either.

The shepherds search for the missing sheep, but can find no "quick cattle but this [baby]. . . / None. . . As loud as he smelled" (789–92). They depart, but not before Gib attempts to make amends for the invasion of the home. He says, "Mak, friends will we be, / For we are all one" (815–16). It is at this moment that the shepherds express social inclusion and solidarity with the thief they have always suspected. Both Mak and Daw express skepticism for this gesture, but had Mak proven not to be the thief they suspect him, he would have had little to set him apart from the other men, bearing up under the same miseries and social disorder: bad weather, social inequity, and an uppity wife.

The height of the comedy culminates when the shepherds return to provide gifts to the newborn child they had forgotten in their haste to depart. The audience knows this infant is the stolen sheep, and watches as the deceived shepherds discover this for themselves. Mary Douglas, in her study of the joking relationship,

²⁷ Here also, one might see the Bakhtinian grotesque body, which is also part of the festive carnivalesque.

sees the joke as “an attack on control: something formal is attacked by something informal, something organised and controlled, by something vital, energetic, an upsurge of life It brings into relation disparate elements in such a way that one accepted pattern is challenged by the appearance of another which in some way was hidden in the first.”²⁸ We can see this relationship in the comedic juxtaposition of the newborn child, the stolen sheep, and the Christ child he prefigures. If this pattern has not been made clear to the audience, we see it when Daw calls the sheep a “little day-starn” (833), the same term of endearment Gib will use to the baby Jesus at the Nativity (1048), only one scene later.

Upon finding the sheep instead of an infant, Daw exclaims, “What the devil is this? He has a long snout!” (843–44). Coll adds, “He is marked amiss. / We wot ill about” (845–46), then Gib, “He is like to our sheep” (850). Despite the obvious discovery, Mak and Gill attempt to continue the ruse. Mak claims he is the man who “got” the child and Gill the woman who bore him. Gill then recites a short rhyme:

A pretty child is he
As sits on a woman’s knee,
A dillydown, pardie,
To gar a man laugh. (876–80)

The absurdity of the image invites laughter. Next, Mak explains the child’s nose was broken, and he was bewitched. Gill explains he was “taken with an elf” and transformed at the stroke of midnight into a fairy changeling. Their desperation is evident, their explanations absurd, but not unfamiliar.

It is Daw who grows angriest, perhaps because he was the one about to kiss the sheep, but also perhaps because he is lowest in social status of the shepherds and has been tricked by one even lower in status: the woman. It is Daw who threatens the thieves, but especially Gill, with the greatest violence:

Let bren this bawd
And bind her fast.
A false scaud
Hang at the last:
So shall thou. (857–62)

Daw also urges his companions, “Sin they maintain their theft, / Let do them to dead” (895–96). The scene itself has the potential to turn either way, toward justice and a hard lesson for thieves, or towards mercy. It is Coll, the first shepherd and presumably the elder, who decides their fate:

²⁸ Douglas, “Social Control,” 364.

Sirs, do my read:
 For this trespass
 We will neither ban ne flite,
 Fight nor chite,
 But have done as tite,
 And cast him in canvas.

(900–05)

Coll offers more possible consequences for the theft as he rejects them: exile, flight, beating or scolding.

This then, is the moment that always puzzles my students the most. Daw has threatened burning, and putting the couple to death. Gill herself had reminded Mak several times that he would hang for this theft. The audience holds its breath; but of course, the original, medieval audience knows what is to come. This has been the same play as last year, and the year before. And yet . . . tension is building, a sense of impending doom for Mak and Gill. The release of this tension with the occasion of laughter, tossing the rascal Mak in a blanket, a penalty that will do no more than make Mak feel uncomfortable and a fool, allows for his reconciliation with his community and re-identification with his social set. Mak's punishment, being tossed in a blanket, was used in medieval medicine and midwifery to induce labor.²⁹ Thus, Mak is feminized and disempowered within his community, even as he is forgiven and reclaimed into the social fold. As sociologist Hans Speier concluded from his study of humor, entitled, "Wit and Politics: An Essay on Laughter and Power," laughter allows the community to smooth over the severity of a dispute, and allows leniency in the penalty.³⁰ Mak is punished, though Gill's guilt as accessory is not. The sheep is returned to its rightful owners, Daw's anger is appeased, and the power of Christian forgiveness is exemplified to the audience.

The play ends with Coll, Gib, and Daw receiving the news of the Nativity from the angels, their singing a sign of the renewed order in the world promised by the newborn Savior. The shepherds travel to Bethlehem where they give gifts to the baby Jesus and praise his mother, Mary. Our shepherds are chosen to receive the news and to see the holy child for themselves because of their two acts of charity: gifts offered to Mak's newborn son, and their forgiveness and leniency for Mak's theft. *The Second Shepherds' Play* is a Nativity play: the use of laughter allows not for the justice Mak deserves but the mercy the Christian savior promises. Laughter

²⁹ I am indebted to Dr. Daniel Pigg (University of Tennessee at Martin) for this insight. See also Michael J. O'Dowd and Elliot E. Philipp, *The History of Obstetrics and Gynaecology* (New York: Parthenon Pub. Group, 1994), 659; and Edward Shorter, *Women's Bodies; A Social History of Women's Encounter with Health, Ill-Health and Medicine*. (New York: Transaction Pub, 1990), 79.

³⁰ Hans Speier, "Wit and Politics: An Essay on Laughter and Power," ed. and trans. Robert Jackall. *American Journal of Sociology* 103.5 (Mar 1998): 1352–401; here 1357.

here is not subversion. It does not function as a tool of authority to exact the expected penalties. Rather, laughter is used to forge social ties, define social connections, express shared identities, and reintegrate the disenfranchised back into the community.

However, Mary Douglas has served us a reminder: the humor can be—and indeed must be—identified in the total social situation.³¹ Within the space and performance time of *The Second Shepherds' Play*, we are shown the choice and effects of reconciliation and social-inclusion through laughter. Christian charity and mercy through laughter is modeled for the audience. But it is Mak and Gill, themselves socially equivalent to the shepherds, who are forgiven and included in the community. There is never any gesture to include or reconcile with the “gentlry-men” of Coll’s initial complaint or the fictional yeoman with the “southern tooth” of Mak’s invention. The status of these figures which generate social friction is left unresolved. We may assume that the shepherds in their depiction of the common sufferings of the community stand as a figure of Everyman, and in fact are more likely to be representative of the majority of their audience members. Yet at the end, is it merely the inclusive community of shepherds and their social equals who are welcomed into the family of God, or all of the Christian community of Mankind? *The Second Shepherds' Play* is but one in a day-long cycle of plays. The play itself is reconciliatory, but has the simultaneous potential for subversion were a later performer to remind the audience of the unresolved depredations of the “gentlry-men” invoked earlier. Ultimately, we may not be able to determine whether this instance of laughter, specifically of Bahktin’s carnivalesque, is conservative or subversive. As Peter Stallybrass and Allon White have argued,

It actually makes little sense to fight out the issue of whether or not carnivals are *intrinsically* radical or conservative, for to do so automatically involves the false essentializing of carnivalesque transgression. The most that can be said in the abstract is that for long periods carnival may be a stable and cyclical ritual with no noticeable politically transformative effects but that, given the presence of sharpened political antagonism, it may often act as *catalyst* and *site of actual and symbolic struggle*.³²

We must determine, rather, whether *The Second Shepherds' Play*, within the context of the larger cycle of plays, as well as in the context of the concurrent activities of festival including gathering the audience, food stalls and market wares, serve to implement the subversion suggested by the play. We should also consider not just the performance of the play itself, but pre-performance activities such as casting

³¹ Douglas, “Social Control,” 363.

³² Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (London: Methuen, 1986), 14.

and rehearsal. *The Second Shepherds' Play* illustrates the dialectic of identification versus alienation within the Wakefield community. Whether it implements subversion, or not, must be determined for each individual performance: each year and in each individual town in which the play is performed.

Chapter 19

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Laughing in Late-Medieval Verse (*mæren*) and Prose (*Schwänke*) Narratives: Epistemological Strategies and Hermeneutic Explorations¹

The old librarian monk Jorge in Umberto Eco's famous novel *The Name of the Rose* (1980) gets it completely wrong when he argues so vehemently against people's allegedly sinful behavior of laughing which he regards as a sign of irreverence against God, or of the revolt of the flesh against the spirit.² Hence he tries to suppress Aristotle's book on *Comedy* altogether, poisoning all those who dare to read the last surviving manuscript held in his monastery collection. Generally speaking, people tend to laugh, they always find occasions to laugh, and laughter is a fundamental characteristic of human life. Of course, Eco predicated his text on this very conflict between a representative of the old, conservative, Church bitterly struggling against laughter that embraces most deeply earthly existence, and a representative of the much more radical open-minded, rationalist Franciscan monk William of Baskerville. Not surprisingly, the latter wins, in a way, whereas the former perishes in the flames when the library burns down together with the copy of Aristotle's *Comedy*. Eco, being an outstanding medievalist himself, was certainly

¹ I would like to express my gratitude to Mark Burde, University of Michigan, for his excellent comments and suggestions. My colleague Fabian Alfie, Dept. of French and Italian, The University of Arizona, offered additional remarks, for which I am thankful.

² Umberto Eco, *Il nome della rosa* (Milan: Gruppo Editoriale Feabri - Bompiani, Sonzogno, 1980), 477–82. See the contributions to *Lektüren: Aufsätze zu Umberto Ecos 'Der Name der Rose'*, ed. Hans-Jürgen Bachorski. Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik, 432 (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1985); and Ruggero Puletti, *Il nome della rosa: Struttura forme e temi*, con una lettera di I. Baldelli (Manduria, Bari, and Rome: Piero Lacaita, 1995), 277–303; Alison L. Ganze, *Postscript to the Middle Ages Teaching Medieval Studies Through Umberto Eco's the Name of the Rose* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2009).

aware that the entire notion of laughing being intimately and exclusively associated with the devil—at times with him, but mostly about him³—was just outlandish and highly narrow-minded, and this also in the Middle Ages. Even though Christ is never said to have laughed (as Jorge emphasizes), comedy, satire, and irony were not at all alien to Christian writers and artists throughout the Middle Ages, if we think, for instance, of the hilarious plays and religious legends by the tenth-century Benedictine canoness Hrotsvit of Gandersheim⁴ or the popular poems/songs in the *Carmina Burana*.⁵

Of course, laughter challenges everything and constitutes an epistemological riddle, hence makes us human in all our physical existence, irreverent and disrespectful, which represents the essence of Jorge's criticism against comedy altogether insofar as he regards it as the source of every evil in this world, especially as the source of the many different manifestations of heresy.⁶ The study of laughter, in other words, allows us to probe more deeply what constitutes human life both in the past and present and how we can situate ourselves in various contexts. Laughter promises to reveal countless dimensions of the human soul, but also innumerable aspects of the complex make-up of human society because laughter expresses so many different individual positions, attitudes, ideas, fears, desires, imaginations, and values. It deconstructs and reconstructs, it exposes and it covers up what is supposed to stay hidden, hence it proves to be quintessential of our existence.

Those who know how to laugh perceive the artificiality of power structures and cut through religious and political manipulations. On the other hand, of course, laughter also belittles, demeans, ostracizes, and marginalizes, so it all depends on the specific position of those who laugh and those who are the butt of the joke. As Philipp Glenn observes, "Laughter proves important socially as a means to show affiliations with others."⁷ And he continues: "One of laughter's most important

³ Valerie Allen, *On Farting: Language and Laughter in the Middle Ages*. The New Middle Ages (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 88–92.

⁴ See my study "Sex on the Stage in an Early Medieval Convent: Hrotsvita of Gandersheim. A Tenth-Century Convent Playwright's Successful Struggle Against the Roman Terence," to appear in *Orbis Litterarum*.

⁵ Max Wehrli, *Literatur im deutschen Mittelalter: Eine poetologische Einführung* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1984), 163–81; the classical study on this large topic still proves to be Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*. Trans. from the German by Willard R. Trask. Bollingen Series, XXXVI (1948; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 417–35. See also Philippe Ménard, *Le Rire et le sourire dans le roman courtoise en France au moyen âge (1150–1250)* (Geneva: Droz, 1969); Jean Verdon, *Le Rire au moyen âge* (Paris: Parrin, 2001).

⁶ Eco, *Il nome della rosa*, 479–80.

⁷ Phillip Glenn, *Laughter in Interaction*. Studies in Interactional Sociolinguistics, 18 (1984; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 29. See also Roy E. Russell, *Life, Mind and Laughter: A Theory of Laughter* (Chicago: Adams Press, 1987). Moreover, cf. the contributions to *Humor and Laughter: Theory, Research, and Applications*, ed. Antony J. Chapman and Hugh C. Foot (1976; New

features lies in its shared nature: that it is produced primarily in the presence of and for the benefit of other persons.”⁸ However, this would be only one angle to approach the topic of laughter, as the rich corpus of late-medieval verse and prose narratives indicates, some of which will be examined here in light of what they reveal about the meaning of laughter as a deeply human characteristic.

Naturally, it cannot be the purpose of this paper to investigate the whole issue on a more theoretical level, considering the profound contributions by such intellectual giants as Plato, Augustine, Kierkegaard, Freud, and Bergson, for instance, without any ranking here.⁹ Instead I will first examine one late-medieval *mære* (verse narrative), “Dis ist von dem Heselin” (The Little Rabbit), where the male protagonist laughs several times at critical junctures that evoke our interest.¹⁰ Following that I will investigate what laughing implies and what intentions it carries in Konrad von Würzburg’s (?) more or less contemporary “Die halbe Birne,” where laughter gains a considerably more aggressive quality, yet also achieves numerous other goals. Subsequently I will turn to the huge, heretofore hardly tapped corpus of late-medieval German *Schwänke* (jest narratives) that was critically determined by humor, satire, and irony in a myriad of manifestations, intentions, and approaches. As in the case of the *mæren*, I will limit myself to several shorter examples and will finally conclude by combining the results of the individual analyses in order to establish a critical platform for future theoretical

Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1996); Michael Billig, *Laughter and Ridicule: Towards a Social Critique of Humour* (London: Sage, 2005).

⁸ Glenn, *Laughter in Interaction*, 30.

⁹ George Meredith, “Comedy: An Essay on Comedy,” and Henri Bergson, “Laughter,” *An Essay on Comedy*. Introduction and Appendix by Wylie Sypher (1956; Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984); *Il riso: Capacità di ridere e pratica del riso nelle civiltà medievali*, a cura di Francesco Mosetti Casaretto (Alessandria: Edizioni dell’ Orso, 2005); for the early investigation of laughter as a fundamental criterion for the study of the Middle Ages, see Otto Rommel, “Die wissenschaftlichen Bemühungen um die Analyse des Komischen,” *Deutsche Vierteljahresschrift für Geistesgeschichte und Literaturwissenschaft* 21 (1943): 161–95. Leander Petzoldt poignantly recognized that nothing is comical by itself, since everything that people laugh about proves to be ridiculous because a spectator regards it as such. See Leander Petzoldt, “Komik der Lebenswelt und ‘volkstümliche’ Komik vom ausgehenden Mittelalter bis zur Reformation,” *Der Deutschunterricht* 36.1 (1984): 22–32; here 26. See also Hans Fromm, “Komik und Humor in der Dichtung des deutschen Mittelalters,” *Deutsche Vierteljahresschrift für Geistesgeschichte und Literaturwissenschaft* 36 (1962): 321–39. For a cumulative overview, see *A Cultural History of Humor: From Antiquity to the Present Day*, ed. Jan Bremmer and Herman Roodenburg (Cambridge, MA: Polity Press; Malden: Blackwell, 1997). The topic of comic is vast and concerns virtually every aspect of human life; hence the plethora of critical studies on laughter both in the Middle Ages and in the modern world. See also my Introduction to the present volume.

¹⁰ For one of the best introductions to this genre, see Hanns Fischer, *Studien zur deutschen Märendichtung*. 2nd, revised and expanded ed. by Johannes Janota (1968; Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1983).

investigations pertaining to the significance of laughter in premodern literature and culture.

Laughter as the fundamental human expression has already been discussed from a plethora of perspectives, drawing from numerous different methodologies and theories, but the phenomenon itself seems inexhaustible, requiring ever new approaches in trying to grasp critical issues determining individual narratives and specific historical events throughout the Middle Ages, whether laughter worked to effect a kind of liberation, to hide embarrassment, to establish a social community of readers and listeners both within the text and outside, or to allow deep-seated emotions, sometimes evil, sometimes virtuous in nature, to come to the fore.¹¹ More often than not laughter proves to be subversive, revelatory, shocking, and surprising, hence it tends to contribute to a fundamental cultural-historical process of negotiating with other people about the best possible cohabitation, of defending oneself against opponents, and of hiding one's own fears and insecurities.¹² In other words, the study of laughter represents a profoundly epistemological investigation that can perhaps achieve some of its best results in light of the peculiar features of late-medieval verse and prose narratives.¹³

In the first, anonymous, *mære*, "Dis ist von dem Heselin" (late thirteenth century), the protagonist laughs twice most ominously and revealingly. Each occurrence proves to be the essential stepping stone in the narrative development where the hero is propelled forward in his quest for honor, individuality, and happiness. However, the young knight's laughter never represents an easy or

¹¹ Sebastian Coxon, *Laughter and Narrative in the Later Middle Ages: German Comic Tales 1350–1525* (Leeds: Legenda, 2008); see also the various contributions to *Lachgemeinschaften: Kulturelle Inszenierungen und soziale Wirkungen von Gelächter im Mittelalter und in der Frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Werner Röcke and Hans Rudolf Velten. Trends in Medieval Philology, 4 (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2005). A somewhat one-sided approach to laughter as the expression of an evil mind-set is pursued by Werner Röcke, *Die Freude am Bösen: Studien zu einer Poetik des deutschen Schwankromans im Spätmittelalter*. Forschungen zur Geschichte der älteren deutschen Literatur, 6 (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1987). The contributors to *A Cultural History of Humour: From Antiquity to the Present Day*, ed. Jan N. Bremmer and Herman Roodenburg (Cambridge, MA: Polity Press, and Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1997), offer significant interpretations of laughter in the various historical periods. See also *Le Rire au moyen âge, dans la littérature et dans les arts: Actes du colloque international des 17, 18 et 19 novembre 1988*, ed. Thérèse Bouché and Hélène Charpentier (Talence: Presses Universitaires de Bordeaux, 1990).

¹² Barry Sanders, *Sudden Glory: Laughter as Subversive History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995); Indhira Gose, *Shakespeare and Laughter: A Cultural History* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, Palgrave, 2008).

¹³ With respect to the sixteenth-century author Martin Montanus, I have already pursued a similar line of arguments, see "Martin Montanus as Entertainer and Social Critic," *The Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature* 62.2 (2008): 11–33.

naive outburst of a light comic mood as might be common among friends or in a larger company, especially because he laughs by himself and even tries to hide the reasons for his laughter when his friends inquire about it.¹⁴ In fact, his laughter about a young peasant girl and a rabbit is clearly marked by a sense of transgression on his part and the realization that he must take a different direction if he ever wants to live up to his own ideals and thereby find joy and tranquility in his existence.¹⁵

Briefly, the plot focuses on a young knight who wins a little rabbit which a peasant girl immediately wants to purchase from him. He demands her *minne* (Middle High German for 'love,' but also sexual fulfillment), which she does not understand, yet happily grants. Once her mother has found out that her daughter has lost her virginity as payment for the rabbit, she punishes her painfully, so the girl tries hard to find the knight again, who actually passes by a few days later. Again they sleep with each other, but the knight allows her to keep the rabbit. Later he is preparing his marriage with a noble lady, and invites the peasant girl and her mother to come to his wedding, but not without the rabbit. When the women appear at court, he laughs out loud, and reveals the truth to his fiancée only under duress. She then scoffs at the peasant girl because she herself has slept with a cleric already hundred times without her mother having found out anything about it. This shocks the young man deeply and he quickly suggests to his friends that he should exchange the brides, which they all support. The narrative concludes with the knight marrying the peasant girl.

Today we might characterize the situation depicted in the story as a case of 'date rape' —not one, assuredly, that can justifiably call forth laughter. In a way the man abuses, if not prostitutes, his unwitting partner insofar as she becomes his victim out of utter ignorance in matters of human sexuality and love and barter her body for the rabbit.¹⁶ Nevertheless, both the knight and we as the audience are invited

¹⁴ For a specific analysis of laughter by oneself or in oneself, as represented by Grendel in the Old English *Beowulf*, see Daniel F. Pigg's contribution to this volume.

¹⁵ Here quoted from *Novellistik des Mittelalters: Märendichtung*, ed., trans., and commentary by Klaus Grubmüller. Bibliothek des Mittelalters, 23 (Frankfurt a. M.: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1996), 590–616; for a solid introduction, collecting all the relevant information presently available, see 1221–23.

¹⁶ *Erotic Tales of Medieval Germany*. Selected and trans. Albrecht Classen, with a contribution by Maurice Sprague. And with an edition of Froben Christoph von Zimmern's "Der enttäuschte Liehaber". Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 328. Second ed. rev. and expanded (2007; Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2009). For the huge topic of sexuality, which is certainly of central importance here as well, see the contributions to *Sexuality in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Times: New Approaches to a Fundamental Cultural-Historical and Literary-Anthropological Theme*, ed. Albrecht Classen. Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern

to laugh about the entire scene because it is so much out of the ordinary and yet so familiar in many respects. Insofar as the knight laughs, a thought process sets in which deeply problematizes the entire relationship between him and the young peasant woman. Furthermore, the male protagonist laughs each time all by himself and finally provokes his future fiancée, also a member of the aristocracy, to inquire about the reason for and the object of this laughter. Whereas his laughter at first reflects the degree to which he had actually abused the peasant girl sexually, at the end his renewed laughter exposes, on the one hand, the latter's truly virtuous nature and, on the other, the hypocrisy of his bride to be. In other words, his laughing emerges as the critical catalyst that drives the entire narrative and profoundly changes the course of events.¹⁷

Considering the title and the central iconic animal in this tale—a little bunny rabbit, or hare for that matter, which we do not need to differentiate for the purpose of our investigation—and keeping in mind its curious and most unusual association with the world of nobility and courtly love,¹⁸ we can immediately perceive a sense of incongruity and the shock value of the conclusion, which, in all likelihood makes us laugh just as much as the medieval audiences. The focus on this small and furry animal, which obviously elicits so much delight among those who get hold of it, also causes laughter because it does not really seem to fit into the world of the courts and yet at the end creates true happiness for the knight and his beloved.¹⁹ As Clemens Zerling confirms, the rabbit was associated with the gods from very early on, then with sexuality and fertility, which was in turn connected with lack of chastity and sinful transgression in the Middle Ages and beyond. Depending on the context, the rabbit could represent the dawn of time, baptism, the soul escaping from the devil's clutches, or attentiveness and sensitivity, if not also nervousness and timidity. As to be expected, many cultures

Culture, 3 (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 2008).

¹⁷ Klaus Grubmüller, *Die Ordnung, der Witz und das Chaos: Eine Geschichte der europäischen Novellistik im Mittelalter: Fabliau – Märe – Novelle* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2006), 78, 127, 132, 141–42, 227, offers a good discussion of the literary-historical context, but he refrains from a deeper analysis of laughter in our narrative.

¹⁸ Albrecht Classen, "Erotic Symbolism, Laughter, and Hermeneutics at Work in Late-Medieval *mæren*. The Case of *Das Häslein*," *Mediaevalia et Humanistica*, NS. 34 (2008): 87–104.

¹⁹ Stephen L. Wailes, "The Hunt of the Hare in 'Das Häslein'," *Seminar* V.2 (1969): 92–101, overemphasizes social incongruities and conflicts, suggesting inappropriately that the young man has badly abused and exploited the peasant girl. Albrecht Classen, "The Fourteenth-Century Verse Novella *Dis ist von dem Heselîn*: Eroticism, Social Discourse, and Ethical Criticism," *Orbis Litterarum* 60.4 (2005): 260–77. For pragmatic purposes I do not differentiate among the rabbit, hare, or bunny rabbit. The narrator himself does not show any interest in making any concrete taxonomic distinction here.

all over the world have expressively incorporated the rabbit into their repertoire of symbolic animals.²⁰

In Hartmann von Aue's "Der arme Heinrich," this animal stands for fearfulness (v. 1123); in his *Erec* the rabbit is identified as the foolish creature that finds itself easily caught in a net (v. 1227); in the *Kaiserchronik* as well it is identified with the rabbit (v. 7132); the traitor Genelun in the Middle High German *Rolandslied* (ca. 1170) by the Priest Konrad contemptuously claims that Roland's blowing of the horn to ask for Charlemagne's help might have been nothing but a signal that he is hunting rabbits (v. 6087). Gottfried von Straßburg, on the other hand, in his *Tristan* (ca. 1210) identifies those who speak up and desire public acclaim as poets, although they are not comparable at all to masters such as Hartmann von Aue, with rabbits (v. 4638).²¹

One of the most powerful and moving representation of the rabbit as an endearing animal can be found in a fifteenth-century manuscript showing Saint Francis seated in a chair holding a rabbit in his lap and tenderly stroking it as an expression of his love for all living creatures. But since Francis also covers the animals eyes with his right hand, we cannot exclude an additional message contained in that miniature.²² Both the Biblical authors and the Church Fathers referred to the rabbit (or hare) as a highly symbolic animal representing sinfulness and the sinners, who tend to hide, for instance, in rocky caves.²³ In a number of late-medieval manuscript illustrations, wood carvings, and tapestry we also come across the topos of the topsy-turvy world where rabbits have turned into the hunters and carry their prey, the human hunter/knight, with them home; a scenery that would have certainly evoked nervous, sarcastic laughter, especially when it was displayed within the church, such as wooden plates on a pulpit.²⁴

²⁰ Clemens Zerling, *Lexikon der Tiersymbolik: Mythologie Religion Psychologie*, ed. Wolfgang Bauer (Munich: Kösel, 2003), 127–30.

²¹ For numerous references, see online at the Middle High German Conceptual Database, maintained at the University of Salzburg, Austria, at: <http://www.mhdbdb.sbg.ac.at:8000/mhdbdb/App?action=TextQueryModule&string=hase&texts=1&startButton=Start+search&contextSelectListSize=20&contextUnit=1&verticalDetail=3&maxTableSize=100&horizontalDetail=3&nrTextLines=9> (last accessed on Sept. 4, 2009).

²² Cod. 1266, fol. 48v, Museo Franceseano, Rome (1457). See the facsimile edition: *Francesco D'Assisi Attraverso l'immagine: Roma, Museo Franceseano Codice Inv. Nr. 1266*, ed. Servus Gleben and Vincenzo Criscuolo. Text by Jürgen Werinhard Einhorn (Rome: Istituto Storico dei Cappuccini, 1992). The text comprises the illustrated *Legenda maior* of Saint Bonaventura, that is the *vita* of Saint Francis. For a reproduction, see the cover for the book *Tierliebe im Mittelalter*, by Gabriele Kompatscher, Albrecht Classen, and Peter Dinzelbacher (Badenweiler: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Bachmann, forthcoming).

²³ Dorothea Forstner OSB, *Die Welt der Symbole*. 2nd rev. ed. (1961; Innsbruck, Vienna, and Munich: Tyrolia-Verlag, 1967), 283–84.

²⁴ See the pulpit in St. Urbanus in Huckarde, today within the city limits of Dortmund, Germany. Its intriguing motif is discussed by Birgit Franke and Barbara Welzel, "Die 'Verkehrte Welt' und

Although scholarship has heretofore treated this short verse narrative, comprising only 506 verses, only tangentially,²⁵ the enigmatic theme of laughter signals that much more is at stake than simply erotic humor and masculine imagination. The text had been copied down in a Strasbourg manuscript (cod. A 94) that was lost in the fire of the library in 1870.²⁶ Contrary to the actual narrative focus, Johannes Janota introduces our text as an account about a girl who purchases a little rabbit from a knight who is passing by her house. True, the author relates an erotic adventure involving these two people, but the brief summary in the *Verfasserlexikon* does not do real justice to the complex nature of our tale.²⁷

Certainly, here we face a "reizvoll erzählte Schwankmäre" (intriguingly related verse narrative) that resembles in its motif both the Old French *fabliaux* "La Grue" and "Le Héron, and the Middle High German *mæren* "Duleclorie" and "Der Sperber." But a careful analysis quickly uncovers a rather unique and somewhat innovative approach to the old theme of courtly love and the erotic encounter of man and woman in a most unusual context (a knight meets a pretty country girl), focusing on an iconic metaphor, the little rabbit, which finds practically no parallels in medieval literature, even if we think of the rich repertoire of *pastourelle* poems.²⁸

One of the problems that forces us to investigate the true meaning of love and sexuality in this narrative consists of the question who this young woman might be who foolishly barter her *minne* (love) for the little bunny rabbit, and so also what this little furry animal symbolizes.²⁹ Friedrich Heinrich von der Hagen simply identified the maid as "ein kindliches Landmädlein" (a childish young

ihre Regeln – Die Kanzel in Huckarde," *Mittelalter und Industrialisierung: St. Urbanus in Huckarde*, ed. Thomas Schilp and Barbara Welzel. Schriften der Conrad-von-Soest-Gesellschaft, 12 (Bielefeld: Verlag für Regionalgeschichte, 2009), 217–39, esp. 219–20, 231–32. See also the plates 26, 27, 32, and 33.

²⁵ W. Maurice Sprague, "Down the Rabbit-Hole," *Jahrbuch der Oswald von Wolkenstein Gesellschaft* 15 (2005): 315–48, treats the tale as a parody of Gottfried von Strasbourg's *Tristan* and as a satire of Hartmann von Aue's *Der arme Heinrich*. The intertextual references are certainly present, but it seems doubtful whether the late-medieval author really tried to ridicule his sources.

²⁶ Arend Mihm, *Überlieferung und Verbreitung der Märendichtung im Spätmittelalter*. Germanische Bibliothek. 3. Reihe: Untersuchungen und Einzeldarstellungen (Heidelberg: C. Winter Universitätsverlag, 1967), 121, 141; for a very detailed analysis of that manuscript, now see *The Order of Saint John's Manuscript A94 of the Strasbourg Commandery*, ed. W. Maurice Sprague. Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik, 742 (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 2005).

²⁷ Johannes Janota, "'Das Häslein'," *Die deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters: Verfasserlexikon*. 2nd compl. rev. ed. by Kurt Ruh et al. Vol. 3 (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1981), 544–45.

²⁸ Frauke Frosch-Freiburg, *Schwankmären und Fabliaux: ein Stoff- und Motivvergleich*. Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik, 49 (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1971), 23–42; Joachim Suchomski, 'Delectatio' und 'Utilitas'. *Bibliotheca Germanica*, 18 (Bern: Francke, 1975), 195, 302–03, n. 508.

²⁹ Stephen L. Wailes, "The Hunt of the Hare in 'Das Häslein'," *Seminar* 5.2. (1969): 92–101.

girl from the countryside).³⁰ He argues that a rabbit as an erotic symbol would also fit better into the world of peasantry than at court, yet he ignores several facts:

The young knight immediately sets out on hunting the rabbit as soon as he has espied it regarding it as a very enjoyable prey, as the narrator comments later once a farm-hand has caught and then handed the animal over to him: “des vröute sich der ritter dô” (39; the knight was very happy about it). Significantly, the knight and his dogs actually fail to catch the rabbit, which had fled into a field of grain, which might foreshadow the young man’s inability to realize his dreams of love. There, however, a worker captures the animal and turns it over to his lord. The protagonist realizes immediately, although operating in a rural setting, that this situation constitutes a courtly adventure: “Diz ist rehte ein âventiure” (41; “This is truly an adventure”), without yet knowing the ultimate implications for himself; then he decides to take the rabbit with him as a gift for his beloved, obviously, as to be expected, a noble lady (45), who has, however, so far rejected the young knight’s wooing. With this rabbit he hopes to melt down her resistance because she is naive and prone to this kind of seduction, which stands in clear contradiction to the firmness that she has expressed so far in rejecting him as her lover. Then, however, the narrator underscores the general observation that young women, or rather children, do not know the true value of material objects and would easily exchange, as the proverb goes, a kingdom for an egg (55). We are not told what to make of the odd reference to the apple that is loved by children (54), and might only surmise that it contains an curious allusion to Eve’s desire for the symbolic apple in the garden of Eden (*Genesis*). Although the rabbit appears to us as the epitome of a creature belonging to the rural, agricultural world of rustics,³¹ its appeal cuts across all class lines in the tale as it becomes the focal point of almost every character’s quasi-obsession. The young knight tenderly strokes it while he is riding toward a village, thinking of his beloved who would be delighted about this little animal.

Once he has approached the farm house, the young woman immediately desires to get hold of the rabbit. Later, once the knight has left and the girl’s mother has returned from church, the latter undoubtedly confirms the beauty of the furry animal, as if it were part of courtly trappings: “. . . wer gap dir daz hübsche tierlîn?” (195; “who gave you this pretty [actually: courtly] little animal?”). And when the knight is planning his wedding, he insists that the maid and her mother attend the festivities and bring the rabbit with them (364–65). However, we are not told what the reasoning might be and can only surmise that the knight regards the rabbit a worthy symbol of his erotic triumphs in the past, almost like a trophy,

³⁰ Friedrich Heinrich von der Hagen, *Gesamtabenteuer: Hundert altdeutsche Erzählungen*. Vol. 2 (1850; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1961), v.

³¹ Wailes, “The Hunt of the Hare.”

along with the young woman whose virginity he had stolen. Nevertheless, he then leaves it behind with the peasant girl and might not achieve his subsequent goal, to woo his own lady who had so far shown him only her cold shoulder. We need to keep all these complex relationships in mind in order to understand the meaning of his laughter.

The narrator describes the young woman, revealingly, not as a crude peasant girl, perhaps such as Heinrich Wittenwiler will introduce the female protagonist Mätzli Rüerenzumpf in his allegorical romance *Der Ring* (ca. 1400, or ca. 1415), the entirely uneducated, plump, and ugly daughter of a peasant who is wooed by an equally ignorant and foolish young man in their village, Bertschi Triefnas (in German both names carry strongly pornographic allusions: her name means: touch the penis; his name means: dripping nose).³² Instead, this young woman, unnamed here, strikes us as most noble in her appearance: “edel, schöne unde fîn” (62; noble, beautiful, and elegant). Moreover, once the knight approaches her, the narrator indirectly reiterates how much she would fit the general model of a courtly lady: “vür die junkvrouwe(n) zart” (68; toward the tender young lady), which strongly reminds us of the manner in which Hartmann von Aue had depicted the young woman who is willing to die for her lord Henry to allow him to recover from his leprosy in *Der arme Heinrich* (ca. 1200), a verse novella that had also been contained in the Strasbourg manuscript A.³³

Nevertheless, the rabbit defies any easy social identification because it is still characterized as being of “wilder art” (67; wild character), which associates the animal with nature, specifically with distance to civilization, and with lack of control, but also with fascination, the demonic, miraculous, and foreign.³⁴ The

³² Heinrich Wittenwiler, *Der Ring. Frühneuhochdeutsch / Neuhochdeutsch*. Nach dem Text von Edmund Weißner ins Neuhochdeutsche übersetzt und herausgegeben von Horst Brunner (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1991), 75–102.

³³ Hartmann von Aue, *Der arme Heinrich*, ed. Hermann Paul, newly ed. Kurt Gärtner. 17th rev. ed. Altdutsche Textbibliothek, 3 (1882; Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2001), 303–48; Maurice Sprague, “Down the Rabbit-Hole,” 341–43, emphasizes the epistemological challenge of the rabbit, whether in the rural or in the courtly context.

³⁴ See the extensive article on “wild” in Jacob Grimm and Wilhelm Grimm, *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, vol. 14/II (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1960), 8–37. Cf. Bruno Quast, “Das Höfische und das Wilde: zur Repräsentation kultureller Differenz in Hartmanns ‘Iwein,’” *Literarische Kommunikation und soziale Interaktion: Studien zur Institutionalität mittelalterlicher Literatur*, ed. Beate Kellner and Peter Strohschneider. Mikrokosmos, 64 (Frankfurt a. M. et al.: Peter Lang, 2001), 111–28. Wolfram von Eschenbach had extensively operated with the semantic ambivalence and meaning of the epithet ‘wild’ in his *Titarel*, see the commentary to the stanzas 157 and 158, quoted from Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Titarel*. Herausgegeben, übersetzt und mit einem Stellenkommentar sowie einer Einführung versehen von Helmut Brackert und Stephan Fuchs-Jolie (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2003), 258–59. Of fundamental value proves to be Klaus Hufeland, “Das Motiv der Wildheit in mittelhochdeutscher Dichtung,” *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie* 95 (1976): 1–19; now see also Horst Wenzel, *Höfische Repräsentation: Symbolische Kommunikation und Literatur im*

young woman is entirely engrossed by the rabbit and does not even pay much attention to the owner, with whom she pleads to let her purchase the little animal: “wan wolte got und wær ez mîn!” (72; would God grant it and let it be mine!). The subsequent hilarious situation is predicated on the notion that love can be purchased because he requests as payment her *minne* (84), the ‘classic’ Middle High German term for courtly love. Whereas so far the knight has been spurned in his wooing of another lady, whom he wanted to win over with the help of the rabbit—also in a kind of barter—now he faces the ‘classical’ male dream situation in which the woman becomes the active agent requesting something from the man, though not necessarily sexual favors. Ironically, since she does not know what the word *minne* might mean, she offers him instead some rings, gems, and a belt, all obviously erotic symbols. Especially the belt carries great meaning and might have been meant by her mother, certainly having manufactured it as a most valuable object worthy for any noble and nubile lady, as a token for her future marriage, made out of silk, decorated with golden threads and pearls. The maiden herself emphasizes: “daran mîn muoter leite ir vlîz / Und aller meisterscheft list” (96–97; my mother put all her efforts into it and applied her greatest skills).

Intriguingly, lord Henry in Hartmann’s verse novella had also used a belt, apart from rings, as a gift for the peasant’s daughter (338), which ultimately had bonded her so intimately to him that he felt entitled to call her his “gemahel” (341; wife). There are numerous other examples of belts serving erotic purposes in medieval literature, apart from their pragmatic, then also military or fashionable function.³⁵ Keeping also in mind where the girl had kept the belt (in her chest together with her other valuable treasures, 89) and how eagerly she is now willing to exchange it, along with her rings, for the rabbit, undoubtedly also a symbol of fertility, we can fully trust the association of the belt with love, sexuality, and marriage.³⁶

Although neither the young knight nor the young woman laugh in this scene, her flippant remark upon his request for her *minne*: ““Sô nement si hin: wes beitent ir? / und gênt den jungen hasen mir, / Und hânt ir iuwer minne”” (107–09; “So take it then, what are you waiting for? Give me the young rabbit, and you can have your minne”), is likely to evoke mirth and joviality about her innocence and naïveté, at least among the male audience. Moreover, the narrator characterizes her, upon her assurance to the knight that she is all alone since her mother and all

Mittelalter (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2005), 122–37 (chapter was orig. printed in *Zeitschrift für feministische Geschichtswissenschaft* 8 [1997]: 257–71).

³⁵ Albrecht Classen, “Der Gürtel als Objekt und Symbol in der Literatur des Mittelalters. Marie de France, *Nibelungenlied*, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* und Dietrich von der Glezze,” *Mediaevistik* 21 (2008, appeared in 2010): 11–37.

³⁶ For a solid confirmation of this interpretation, see the highly symbolic function of the belt in Dietrich von der Gletze’s more or less contemporary verse narrative, “Der Gürtel,” see *Erotic Tales of Medieval Germany*, 19–28.

the servants have gone to church—there is never any word about the father—and hence that he can easily and confidently go about searching for her *minne*, as a “linde turteltiubelîn” (115; beautiful turtle dove), both an expression of her beautiful and lovely appearance and a satirical swipe at her ignorance and overbearing urgency to acquire the rabbit at any cost; at any rate a most ambivalent epithet, evoking both archaic and Biblical (Matt. 3:16) images of pure love and spirituality.³⁷ The narrator subsequently adds numerous other epithets to compare her beauty to that of angels and to make her metaphorically to God’s beloved, underscoring her extraordinary physical attractiveness. Moreover, she emerges as the material manifestation of love itself and hence as the absolute power over all men in this life (148–58).³⁸

Nevertheless, after the knight has made love to her twice, and she still wants more from him, he takes leave, disregarding all her pleading, yet laughing for the first time: “der ritter lachende dannân reit” (186; the knight rode away laughing). He laughs about her foolish assumption that this sexual tryst could be equated with a commercial exchange; he laughs because she has enjoyed the sexual contact with him so much and wants more than he is willing, or capable, to give since he is afraid of the mother’s return. He probably also laughs because his sexual dream has come true in a most unexpected fashion because in her innocence she has discovered the joys of sexuality and now would like to get full satisfaction from him. We might even suspect that his laughter expresses relief that his sexual crime will not be punished. Finally, he also laughs over the funny situation insofar as he is already riding away, whereas she is yelling after him to stay behind and to sleep with her a third time in order to receive the full payment for his rabbit. She goes so far as to express her worry that he might suffer a loss in ‘financial’ terms if he does not listen to her advice and get all the *minne* that belongs to him in return for the rabbit: “. . . wellent ir niht herwider komen, / sô ist mir iuwer schade leit” (184–85; “if you are not willing to return, I’ll regret your loss”).

What kind of laughter might this be? To some extent he is surely laughing about her ignorance with regard to sex and men, thus expressing a certain contemptuousness. But he is also laughing because an old sexual desire has suddenly been fulfilled, and he expresses his relief that his impromptu scheme worked out so well although he is fully aware that he abused the young woman; so we might say that his laughter reveals a certain degree of shame and

³⁷ Hans Biedermann, *Knaurs Lexikon der Symbole* (Düsseldorf: Droemer Knauer, 1989), 436–37.

³⁸ For the symbolism of the dove in the Middle Ages, whether representing Christ, the Holy Spirit, the loving mate, or the widow, see M. Grams-Thieme, “Taube,” *Lexikon des Mittelalters*. Vol. 8 (Munich: Lexma Verlag, 1996), 491–92. The turtledove appears, of course, in the *Physiologus*, which originated in antiquity and circulated widely throughout the Middle Ages. Here this bird is closely associated with Christ and intense love for the mate. *Physiologus*, trans. by Michael J. Curley (1979; Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), 56–57.

embarrassment. And his laughter also expresses the surprise for him that sex can be obtained so easily, whereas before he seems to have experienced only rejection. Finally, we could also assume that his laughter uncovers an inner insecurity as to his own sexual potency. Having gotten away safely after having slept two times with the young woman frees him from proving his masculinity one more time, which then could even have been impossible, whereas she is described, according to the old misogynous tradition habitually embraced by members of the Church and other men since the time of the Church Fathers, as nymphomaniac and dangerous. Ultimately, there is no doubt that his laughter reflects multiple levels of meaning, opening various types of his feelings (happiness and fear) to critical scrutiny.

From here, the narrative takes several surprising turns insofar as the young woman, having been badly punished by her mother upon learning how she had acquired the rabbit, demands the return of her *minne* from the knight once she has met him again, which he happily complies with, and he even allows her to keep the rabbit. Significantly, in this situation no one laughs, perhaps as an indication that the case now has become very serious. The young woman's mother naturally expresses deep bitterness when she learns of the second tryst between the knight and her daughter, but she advises the latter to put on the symbolic head-gear and to pretend that she has not yet lost her virginity (317–20). Next the knight prepares, upon his friends' and family's recommendation, his marriage with a noble lady, and at that moment he remembers his old tryst. Why he invites mother and daughter to his wedding is not made fully determined by the textual analysis, though the surprising conclusion allows for a somewhat speculative interpretation that he is really in love with her, since the narrator explicitly refers to his noble heart in this moment (348). To be sure, his first thought turns toward the rabbit: "gedâht ouch an sîn heselîn" (344; he thought of his little rabbit), only then does he also consider the maid and the erotic adventure (345–46).

When he arrives in the village, the young woman detects him first and points out the knight to her mother. The narrator suddenly reveals to us: "diu juncvrouwe von êrste ersach / ir vriunt, ze dem si herze truoc" (354–55; the maid saw him first, for whom she felt love in her heart). We are also told that the mother firmly believes that considering that he had first slept with her daughter he also should marry her (366–73).

When the two women appear at court, the younger one carrying the rabbit with her, the knight breaks into a peal of laughter—and this for a second time in the narrative—that surprises everyone. But despite all their inquiries, he knows how to keep a secret fully aware, as the narrator signals, of the embarrassment that he would suffer if he were to reveal his sexual 'crime' (407–08). However, from the context and the subsequent comments by the narrator we cannot firmly conclude

that he is filled with guilt, despite his firm intention to keep everything a secret. After all, his fiancée also wonders about his laughter and unwittingly qualifies it as a "*herzeclîchez lachen*" (413; laughter from the heart), hence as a friendly kind of laughter, perhaps reflecting sympathy, and certainly joy and happiness because of the other person, her very competitor for the knight's heart. For her there must be a special meaning to his laughter, otherwise she would not have insisted that he reveal the secret to her, threatening him that he would have to face for the rest of his life an evil-minded wife: "*... oder ir gewinnet niemer guot wîp / an mir unde lieben tac*" (424–25; "... or you will never have a good wife in me and not one pleasant day). She is obviously filled with jealousy and insecurity, which the narrator circumscribes with "*vürwitz*" (417; curiosity). Whereas before his laughter had indicated his inner happiness and joy about this memory, and certainly also his delightful thoughts about the previous sexual experience with the peasant woman, now the very opposite proves to be the case and he is threatened with the scenario of suffering his whole life from his wife and her mistreatment.

The situation even grows worse for him once he has finally admitted to her the real reason for his laughter, namely that he had been able to sleep with the young woman for the price of the rabbit, which resulted in the mother heavily beating her daughter as punishment for her sexual transgression. The fiancée scoffs at the other woman's foolishness having related everything to her mother since it would have been so easy to keep the sexual tryst a secret. She herself, as she now impulsively admits, apparently an expert in such matters, has slept with the local chaplain more than hundred times, and yet no one has ever found it out (443–46). Of course, with these words she has finally revealed this egregious misbehavior to her own future husband, not realizing how much she has undermined her own honor and put her status at grave risk. Everything would have gone its regular course leading to a happy wedding if the knight had not been forced to tell her the reason for his laughter and if she had not openly and aggressively commented on the other woman's alleged foolishness, completely misunderstanding the true reason for his laughter.

Significantly, she focuses only on the girl's suffering at her mother's hands and her failure to keep the sexual encounter a secret, naively assuming, on the basis of her own love affair, that her female 'competitor' had similarly pursued sexuality as her primary goal, whereas the latter had only intended to acquire the little rabbit the first time around, and to regain her virginity the second time. The narrative thus triggers a poignant laughter directed at the lust-driven fiancée and her utter lack of modesty and morality which she exposes quite involuntarily at this crucial juncture all by herself. In her garrulousness she openly discusses her own secret in order to ridicule the other woman and thereby transforms into the true object of laughter.

Moreover, the knight also has become the target of laughter because the threat of having to face an evil wife for the rest of his life had terrified him so much that he did not dare to keep the reason for his own laughter a secret. Although he will subsequently take the initiative again and regain the upper hand in this struggle between the two genders, rejecting his fiancée and opting instead for the peasant girl, at this moment he already demonstrates the typical characteristics of a hen-picked husband who will later be badly cuckolded and would have to obey his wife in every respect simply out of fear of her chastisement. Altogether, both have committed a severe transgression, and both quickly experience the expected consequence, but not without first playing perfectly the role of the stereotypical husband or wife caught in an evil marriage.³⁹ For the knight her comments reveal an abyss of sinfulness on her part which entails for himself profound fear about her future tendency to commit adultery, whereas she perceives her chance to control this man in every possible respect because her threat had worked exceedingly well.⁴⁰

Nevertheless, in this most uncomfortable situation the knight quickly takes action, asks the peasant girl to sit next to him at his table, then reveals the entire anecdote to the present company, including his fiancée's sexual aberrations, subsequently consults with his friends, and finally decides to marry his innocent victim instead, thereby reconstituting both her and his own honor, whereas the other woman is sent home to her chaplain and is no longer mentioned in the narrative, having been utterly disgraced. Again we may assume on the basis of the narrative development that this surprising outcome served to trigger laughter among the medieval audience, which would have reflected a sense of relief about the happy development of events. After all, his friends speak up with one voice and recommend that he take as his wife the woman with the rabbit: "daz er die junge fine / mit dem heselîne / ze rehte wîben solte" (493–95; that he should marry the fine young lady with the rabbit), thereby elevating the rabbit in its symbolic significance, reflecting both virginity and fertility, to the only relevant benchmark by which he is to choose the right woman as his wife.

However, the narrator qualifies the knight's laughter upon the arrival of both women with the bunny rabbit at his wedding feast in negative terms, commenting

³⁹ Though focusing on a different genre, for this topic see Susanne Fritsch-Staar, *Unglückliche Ehefrauen: Zum deutschsprachigen malmariée-Lied*. Philologische Studien und Quellen, 134 (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 1995).

⁴⁰ The same situation finds countless parallels in medieval literature, so, for instance, "Bislavret" by Marie de France, where the wife forces her husband to reveal the whole truth about his weekly whereabouts although he has warned her of the dire consequences of his confession for both of them. See R. Howard Bloch, *The Anonymous Marie de France* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 79–82.

that he had welcomed her badly at his court: “die er von êrst mit spotte enpfie” (466; whom he had welcomed with mockery), which is certainly true at first sight. Nevertheless, as we have already seen above, each laughter proves to be highly challenging and complex and requires further probing. To be sure, his friends had encouraged him to disregard the untrustworthy fiancée and to take the other woman as his bride instead: “ob er gedenken wolte, / waz billich wære und êre” (496–97; to take the young fine woman with the little rabbit as his proper wife if he were to keep in mind what would be proper and honorable). Insofar as this then happens indeed, we have to inquire further what the meaning of his laughter might have been.

The knight laughs because he remembers how the deal with the bunny rabbit had been arranged (594), and also how the poor woman then had suffered at her mother’s hands (596), although he himself would have deserved to be beaten up by her considering the utter innocence and naïveté displayed by the victim of the mother’s wrath. We also need to keep in mind the central symbol, the rabbit that appears three times in this *mære*.⁴¹ The first time it obviously represents the knight’s erotic desires and the girl’s awakening sexuality. The second time when she sleeps with the knight again in order to regain her virginity she surprisingly disregards him altogether and instead entirely focuses on the rabbit which she seems to love more than anything else in the world: “diu juncvrouwe dicke blicket ie / an ir vil liebez heselîn” (272–73; the young woman constantly gazed at her beloved little rabbit). The third time the rabbit reminds him of the tryst and his sexual success with the girl.

Did he not expect mother and daughter to follow up on his invitation? Why does he now react with such a surprise when he recognizes them along with the rabbit? When he had received the rabbit from the farm-hand he had expressed great joy, both about the little animal and also about the chance to convince the lady whom he had wooed for a long time without success to grant him finally her love. As soon as the young village woman had offered him to purchase the rabbit from him, he demanded *minne* from her, and we might claim that this constitutes a quick substitute for the love he had actually had in mind. Laughing about the two women and the rabbit upon their arrival at his court evidently triggers a whole thought process taking him back to the very beginning of the adventure and then

⁴¹ Rudolf Schenda, “Hase,” *Enzyklopädie des Märchens*, ed. Rolf Wilhelm Brednich. Vol. 6 (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1990), 542–55. Often, in depictions of the Virgin Mary in the garden, together with the unicorn, such as in the fifteenth-century tapestry kept in the Musée de Cluny, Paris, CL. 10831-4, we regularly observe rabbits as well, obviously as symbolic animals, see online at (both last accessed on Jan. 30, 2010): <http://www.allfranceinfo.com/images/paris/unicorn.jpg>; or at: http://www.musee-moyenage.fr/homes/home_id20393_u112.htm

to the subsequent stages in his unexpected and successful pursuance of love, or rather, sexuality.

But does he love the girl? Or is he only delighted to meet her again because he had enjoyed sex so much with her? At any rate, he is then blackmailed by his fiancée to relate everything, and soon after his own laughter gets stuck in his throat, so to speak, because his future wife turns out to be a vile and dishonorable person who would only make him into a cuckold. But that is the very moment when the audience begins to laugh because they can observe the sudden change in his mind and feeling. Moreover, the final decision to marry the girl with the rabbit instead of the whore of a fiancée reconstitutes honor and brings the story to a full circle.

Of course, the ultimate outcome proves to be utopian, very similar to the case of Hartmann von Aue's *Der arme Heinrich*,⁴² but insofar as laughter structures the entire narrative, we can easily understand how much the narrator really aims at shedding light on deep-seated emotions and sexual desires that are brought together at the end as best expressed by the rabbit. The knight had hunted the furry animal, then lost it in the wheat field, then gained it from the farm hand, bartered it subsequently to the girl for her love, regained it in the second tryst, granted it back to her, and is now, at the wedding feast, regaining it for the third time because he marries the owner, the young peasant girl.

Realizing the fundamental significance of this symbolic animal also in structural terms, which sheds important light on the conditions of the two sexual trysts, we can finally fully grasp why the knight laughed so hard. Most importantly, it forces him to reveal the secret to his fiancée, which provokes her to reveal her own, and which then convinces all his friends that only the young woman with the rabbit deserves to be his wife. Undoubtedly, the analysis of these two scenes with him laughing and remembering the relevant context proves to be most enlightening as we are suddenly granted introspection into his mind and can perceive numerous attitudes toward the abused girl: delight, contempt, fascination, and admiration. Moreover, the entire narrative set-up strongly invites the audience to laugh about and with the male protagonist because of his sexual triumphs, which also prove to be, critically viewed, a form of abuse in both cases, and because he turns into a near victim of his own machinations with the rabbit.

Ultimately, we are invited to laugh because of the intriguingly ambivalent function of the rabbit which connects two young people and helps them to get married despite the most unlikely situation, considering the vast difference of their

⁴² On this concept in the Middle Ages, see Heiko Hartmann, "Utopias / Utopian Thought," *Handbook of Medieval Studies*, ed. Albrecht Classen (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, forthcoming). See also the contributions to *En quête d'Utopies*, ed. Claude Thomasset and Danièle James-Raoul. Cultures et Civilisations Médiévale (Paris: Presses de l'Université Paris-Sorbonne, 2005).

social classes. The rabbit plays the role of destiny and allows true erotic feelings to triumph over any courtly marriage arrangement and social standards, as the narrator concludes: “daz sîn sol, daz muoz geschehen” (504; what shall happen, must happen). As any good symbol, the rabbit carries numerous meanings, and their unwitting combination in an unexpected context makes the knight laugh, which finally exposes the sexual tryst with the peasant girl to the public.⁴³ The deep but still unconsciously budding love between these two young people is thus allowed to come forward, although under normal circumstances the knight would have never considered her as his wife in the first place because of the social constraints. His laughter deconstructs the social framework predicated on marriage according to feudal norms, and opens the perspective toward marriage based on love irrespective of the social backgrounds of the two partners, for that time certainly a utopian concept proposed only once before this tale, by Hartmann von Aue in his “Der arme Heinrich” (ca. 1180–1200).

Both the rabbit and the knight’s laughter thus reveal secrets and expose the inner feelings that truly bond the knight and the peasant woman, a most unlikely couple, especially in medieval society. So Stephen Wailes might be right in his comment that the “story’s comedy is at the girl’s expense, and there is no warmth in the apparently conciliatory ending.”⁴⁴ Nevertheless, the knight laughs loudly, and this laughter pushes him out of his ordinary path, forcing him to face reality with two very different women who embrace almost opposite ethical value systems. Without the two occasions of laughter, however, this utopian concept would not have become reality. In the first instance, he laughs out of simple joy that sex with her had been so easy and enjoyable for both of them and that she actually would have liked to receive more. In the second instance, he laughs as a result of the sudden confrontation with the previous situation and its strong and most positive contrast to the present wedding set-up.

As Klaus Grubmüller has already indicated, his laughter at the wedding celebration

markiert eine emotionale Spannung, es zeigt eine Affektation des Ritters an, die auszudrücken er sich nicht in der Lage sieht. Dieses Lachen enthüllt, ohne mitzuteilen. Es ist deshalb, obgleich durch Öffentlichkeit ausgelöst, doch ein Lachen gegen die Öffentlichkeit.⁴⁵

⁴³ Hans Biedermann, *Knaurs Lexikon der Symbole*, 181–83.

⁴⁴ Wailes, “The Hunt of the Hare,” 100. He concludes: “The ‘Häslein’ is an excellent example of literary amusement for the courts which depends on a depreciative involvement of the lower classes.”

⁴⁵ Klaus Grubmüller, “Wer lacht im Märe – und wozu?,” *Lachgemeinschaften: Kulturelle Inszenierungen*, 2005, 111–24; here 115.

[demarcates an emotional tension; it reveals an certain emotion in the knight which he cannot express. This laughter reveals without communicating. Therefore it is, although triggered by the public framework, a laughter against the public.]

This observation indeed allows us to comprehend further what is really going on in that curious moment. But, similarly as in the famous love song by Walter von der Vogelweide, “Under der linden” with the indirect observers who laugh out of deep joy concerning the fulfilled love scene in the meadow at the edge of the forest, i.e., under the linden tree, the knight does not laugh in protest against or in defense of the public.⁴⁶ On the contrary, as the subsequent deliberations with his friends and relatives indicate, this laughter reveals a dream world and allows that one to merge with a future reality, the marriage of the knight with the young peasant woman. Seen from a different perspective, the fiancé’s laughter actually triggers the bride’s sordid secret and so allows him to jettison her from his own life and to turn to the woman whom he truly loves, or, at least, whom he should really marry in terms of honor.

The same manuscript S that burnt in Strasbourg in 1870 contained also the other example that I want to focus on, “Diu halbe bir” (The Half Pear) by the pseudo Konrad von Würzburg (late thirteenth, perhaps early fourteenth century).⁴⁷ It was, however, also included in several other late-medieval manuscripts and seems to have enjoyed more popularity, perhaps because of the erroneous attribution to this famous Middle High German poet.⁴⁸ The comparison between both narratives will allow a much deeper understanding of the motivation for laughter because the situations are intriguing parallel and yet quite opposite. As in the “Heselin,” laughter also erupts here twice, although both times there is a deep sense of anger, bitterness, contempt, and lack of trust. Love also plays a major role, but it faces a severe challenge because of the lady’s arrogance. Nevertheless, even in “Diu halbe bir” laughter opens deeply hidden dimensions of desire, sexuality, insecurity, and the need for identity and self-assurance.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Walther von der Vogelweide, *Leich, Lieder, Sangsprüche*, 14th, completely new ed. by Christoph Cormeau (1827; Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1996), no. 16 (L. 39, 11); see also my discussion of the laughter alluded to in Walther’s song in the introduction to this volume.

⁴⁷ Maurice Sprague, *The Order of Saint John’s Manuscript A94*, 68–74.

⁴⁸ *Novellistik des Mittelalters*, ed. Klaus Grubmüller, 1083–85.

⁴⁹ Norbert Richard Wolf, “Die halbe Birne A,” *Die deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters: Verfasserlexikon*. 2nd compl. rev. ed. by Kurt Ruhé et al. Vol. 3 (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1981), 404–05; for a recent discussion, see Christopher Young, “At the End of the Tale: Didacticism, Ideology and the Medieval German Mære,” in *Mittelalterliche Novellistik im europäischen Kontext: Kulturwissenschaftliche Perspektive*, ed. Mark Chinca, Christopher Young, and Timo Reuvekamp-Felber. Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie, 13 (Berlin: Schmidt; 2006), 24–47. Although Young makes a solid attempt to compare this *mære* with other, challenging, narratives investigating the basic nature of courtly culture, such as Ulrich von Liechtenstein’s *Frauenbuch*,

At first sight, the narrative framework seems to represent the very opposite insofar as the protagonist is a high ranking noble lady whom everyone loves and admires.⁵⁰ Her father has announced in public that the one knight who would perform most impressively at a tournament could marry his nubile daughter. One knight, identified as Arnolt, indeed quickly demonstrates to be superior to all his competitors, and the king invites him to his court to dine with them all. Whereas everything seems to have developed well for the young man so far, things break down after dinner when pears are being served for desert. Instead of peeling them, as courtly manners would require, he simply cuts one of them apart, greedily eats one half and offers the other to his lady. The narrator himself underscores that this constituted a severe transgression of courtly norms because he exposed himself as a voracious eater disrespectful of proper behavior (92). If Christopher Young's reading is correct, we might even go so far as to identify his eating habit as an expression of how he intends to treat his lady in sexual terms, devouring her, so to speak, without any respect for her individuality and courtly norms.⁵¹

He has hardly left the court when the princess yells down to him: "ei schafaliers, werder helt, / der die biren unbeschelt / halben in den munt warf, / waz er zühete noch bedarf! . . ." (103–05; Oh, courtier, worthy knight, you ate the pears without peeling them, throwing the half into your mouth. You still need education! . . .). Without telling us explicitly, the narrator implies that she is laughing at him, mocking him in crudest fashion, and exposing him to public ridicule, especially when she repeats her comments, screaming them out in the loudest way at the very moment when he is preparing himself for the next attack on the tournament field (111–14).

Whereas in the previous narrative the misunderstanding between the two young people led to his laughter and ridicule of the peasant girl, disregarding the mother's deep wrath over this kind of rape, here Arnolt becomes utterly enraged and seeks his revenge (121–27). His squire advises him to resort to a cunning and to transform into a fool with a club, pretending to be a mute who cares little about any norms of behavior, hitting everyone and acting like a crazy person.⁵² Arnolt

I cannot see any concrete evidence produced by him to shed more light on our tale. He comments, for instance, 46, "In both cases, it becomes evident that the texts are not producing an account of disavowed courtliness, a code that contains its own dangerous antithesis that can potentially be sprung like a trap at any moment, but a restatement of courtly ideals." Despite all his efforts to apply the findings of Žižak to the interpretation of this narrative, there is no concrete evidence of a specific or concrete conclusion or further insight into the deeper structure of our narrative. See also the contribution to this volume by Olga V. Trokhimenko.

⁵⁰ Here I quote the text from *Novellistik des Mittelalters*, ed. Klaus Grubmüller, 178–206.

⁵¹ Young, "At the End of the Tale," 41–42.

⁵² Wolf, "Die halbe Birne A," points out the broader tradition of the central motif in our tale, of a man who puts on the mask of a fool in order to gain access to his beloved, even without her knowing about his true identity. In the fifteenth century, the Nuremberg barber poet Hans Folz

follows this recommendation, and although the court society expresses fear about his violence, they also enjoy his presence and poke fun at him as well, as if they perceive in him the one individual who has not yet been subjugated by the education process and acts out all of their own inner desires for total freedom and lack of self-constraint: “und triben mit im iren schimpf” (193; and had fun with him). Under the disguise of a fool the young man can observe the women’s living quarters closely, until one of the chambermaids, who had come out to relieve herself (231), discovers him and reports of this good opportunity to her lady to have some sexual fun with this crude man.⁵³

Most importantly, he is completely naked, and the women pay close attention to his large genitals: “sîn vil lanc geschirre / daz hienc im in die aschen” (262–63; his very long penis hang down to the ashes). Not only that, soon enough he is standing in front of them with an erection (280–82), and the lady decides, after a lengthy debate with an old confidant, to sleep with him. The fool is led to her bed, where she is already waiting for him, but he deliberately refrains from any action, creating urgent desire and also frustration in her. Even when the old chambermaid pushes him between the princess’s legs, he pretends not to understand any of the sexual intentions, until finally, being repeatedly poked by the old woman, he seems to understand what is expected from him. But his plan is to get his revenge, so he denies her sexual satisfaction, or, as we would say, prevents her from experiencing orgasm, a most explicit reference that hardly finds a parallel in medieval literature: “dô ez in die wîse kam, / daz die vrôuden zuo sigen, / dô liez er die schœne ligen, / alles liebes âne” (380–83; when the point was reached when the pleasures win the victory, he abandoned the beauty, denying her love [orgasm]). In her frustration she appeals to the chambermaid for help, and yells at her: “stüpf, maget Irmengart / durch dîne wîpliche art, / diu von geburt an erbet dich, / sô reget aber der tôre sich!” (385–88; “poke him, maid Irmengart, in the name of your womanly nature that you have inherited from birth, so that this fool will move [push]). Finally, orgasm is reached, as the narrator indicates most explicitly, perhaps even for the chambermaid,⁵⁴ referring to the exhaustion of the sweet feeling (“süezekeit,” 595), but the fool is soon thereafter thrown out of the castle.

Altogether, laughter and sarcastic jokes have dominated this part so far already twice, first when the lady had mocked the knight for his lack of proper manners in eating a pear, second when she used him for her sexual satisfaction. But laughter continues to determine the narrative development, though then it will

composed the same story, using the same title, hence the addition of the letter ‘B’ to his version. Mireille Schnyder, “Die Entdeckung des Begehrens: Das Mære von der halben Birne,” *Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur* 122. 2 (2000): 263–78; here 269.

⁵⁴ Schnyder, “Die Entdeckung,” 272.

erupt on the other side as well and then suddenly reveal its destructive force within a courtly context. Upon the squire's recommendation, the knight now returns to the tournament and demonstrates his outstanding abilities, though not without being made to the object of the lady's repeated mockery: "'ei schafaliers, werder helt, / der die biren ungeschelt / halber in den munt warf, waz er zühte noch bedarf!'" (440–03; "oh, chevalier, honorable hero, you are the one who ate the pears unpeeled, you still need much education!"). Ironically, however, the very formulation that she uses to make fun of him also allows him to retort equally mockingly, if not even worse for her: "ei, schafaliers, hôher muot! / stüpfä, frouwe Irmengart, / durch dîne wîplîche art, / diu von geburt an erbet dich, / sô reget aber der tôre sich!'" (445–49; "oh chevalier, endowed with high spirits! Lady Irmengart, poke him, in the name of your womanly nature that you have inherited from birth, then the fool will move!").

It is a direct quote, but now uttered by the man, and in a most aggressive, sarcastic manner, though not with the simple intention to get his revenge for her mistreatment. At first, however, the knight fully achieves his goal, putting both ladies into utter shame: "wir sint ze laster beide komen" (457; we both have fallen into shame). Significantly, now the chambermaid admits that her lady's mockery of his lack of upbringing was unfair and inappropriate, and that hence they both deserved his ridicule. To avoid further embarrassment, however, she also recommends that she quickly change her mind and accept the knight as her husband (469–72). The outcome seems to be a happy marriage, but the narrator underscores that the knight remained suspicious of his wife for the rest of his life because of her bad treatment in the night scene: "durch daz ungelücke, / daz im des nahtes do geschach, / dô man in stüpfete und stach / in der kemenâten" (483–86; because of the maliciousness [misfortune] that affected him in the night when they pushed and poked him in the bedroom). In fact, all laughter chokes in the throat here because the knight, despite having gotten his revenge, develops a strong hatred against his wife (498), obviously, as the narrator's comments indicate, because of her lack of sexual moderation, lack of modicum, and his humiliating treatment at her hand.

To be sure, his masculinity was at stake.⁵⁵ Not only did he suffer from her sarcastic laughter when he ate the pear without peeling it, exposing him publicly to shame, but at night she added insult to injury by making her chambermaid poke and push him to initiate the sexual act. Of course, he emerges as the winner and has also laughed at her, but the public never seems to understand the meaning of his enigmatic words uttered on the tournament field. The marriage quickly covers

⁵⁵ For a critical discussion of Masculinity Studies within the medieval context, see Daniel Pigg's entry in *The Handbook of Medieval Studies*, ed. Albrecht Classen, forthcoming.

all previous conflicts, though deep resentments continue to brew and undermine any potential happiness of their life together.

Considering, however, knight Arnolt's misbehavior in the first part of the narrative, which represents, irrespective of its minuscule nature, a major transgression within the courtly context, her laughter penetrated deeply and stung him badly, although we never find out whether he subsequently changed his eating styles or learned the courtly code of behavior better. The lady's laughter attacked him so directly because he had also displayed a tendency toward greed and lack of self-control, eating his half of the pear first before offering the other to his lady.⁵⁶ However, in the bedroom scene, she had demonstrated the same kind of immodesty and excessive desire for physical satisfaction. Not untypical of medieval misogynous literature, his transgression is limited to bad eating habits, whereas at night he commands so much inner strength that he can control all his sexual urges, even when he is already lying on her naked body. In fact, he has to be pushed and coerced to penetrate her and to engage in a coitus with her.

Her transgression, by contrast, concerns sexuality where she knows no bounds and is willing to sleep even with a dirty, mute, foolish looking man. Not surprisingly, she subsequently gains the upper hand and can laugh at him in this situation, so to speak, insofar as she successfully (ab)uses him for her sexual pleasures, but only to be exposed shortly thereafter when he repeats the same phrases that she had employed beforehand, thus threatening to reveal the secret to the entire court, badly undermining her pretense to command the highest level of courtly manners and education.⁵⁷ Insofar as she had allowed her physical desire to overwhelm all her previous concerns for courtly decorum and ethical standards in public performance, she unwittingly allows the truth about her own double standards to come to the fore, which in turn invites both the male protagonist and the audience to laugh, though the text does not specifically comment on that reaction.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Jan-Dirk Müller, "Die *hovezuht* und ihr Preis: Zum Problem höfischer Verhaltensregulierung in Ps.-Konrads 'Halber Birne'," *Jahrbuch der Oswald von Wolkenstein Gesellschaft* 3 (1984/1985): 281–311; see also Stephen L. Wailes, "Konrad von Würzburg and Pseudo-Konrad: Varieties of Humour in the 'Märe'," *Modern Language Review* 69 (1974): 98–114.

⁵⁷ Scholarship has often referred to this narrative, but the focus has mostly rested on the moral and social implications regarding courtly behavior and the gender conflict, not yet, however, on the significant moment of laughter. See, for instance, Hanns Fischer, *Studien zur deutschen Märendichtung*, 2, 67, 87, et passim; Karl-Heinz Schirmer, *Stil- und Motivuntersuchungen zur mittelhochdeutschen Versnovelle*. Hermaea: Germanistische Forschungen, Neue Folge, 26 (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1969), 36, 98, 192, 297; Ingrid Strasser, *Vornovellistisches Erzählen: Mittelhochdeutsche Mären bis zur Mitte des 14. Jahrhunderts und altfranzösische Fabliaux*. Philologica Germanica, 10 (Vienna: Fassbaender, 1989), 25, 169, 171, 191.

⁵⁸ Klaus Grubmüller, *Die Ordnung, der Witz*, 202–04.

Most importantly, both protagonists utilize the particular setting of the tournament, hence of the public forum, to laugh loudly about the other person and to make the victim of their joke feel the pressure of shame. But there is a remarkable difference, after all. The lady ridicules the knight without pursuing any particular reason, except for underscoring how well mannered and educated she believes to be, whereas he would deserve to be severely criticized and chastized. In fact, Arnolt blushes and displays considerable embarrassment because all of his friends have heard the lady's mocking words (118–20). Her laughter, then, painfully hurts him and reveals a very dangerous angle not seen yet in previous examples, especially because she exposes him in public.⁵⁹ When Arnolt laughs at her, retorting in the same way as she had done before, he does not allow the others to understand fully the meaning of his words, so his laughter remains somewhat private, similarly as in the case of the previous *mære*. Nevertheless, the chambermaid quickly realizes correctly and painfully the danger for her lady and herself and urges the latter to accept the knight in marriage, thus to cover her shamefulness.

But altogether, as the narrator emphasizes at the end, the laughter uttered by both indicates their individual ethical and moral weakness and the need to pull oneself together in order to survive in courtly society. After all, neither one has committed a crime in the concrete sense of the word; instead they both can only be blamed for a small social misdeed (“missetât,” 509), or transgression. Nevertheless, as the ghastly consequences of their respective laughter implies, such relatively small missteps in public can easily mean the loss of one's honor and public standing. In other words, just as in the case of “Dis ist von dem heselin,” the critical analysis of specific scenes with protagonists laughing powerfully opens meaningful perspectives into the domain of identity, honor, self-esteem, and social and gender roles.

In the late fifteenth and especially in the sixteenth century many writers of such entertaining and yet also moral tales turned from verse to prose, and in this process incorporated many new themes and motifs, and they picked their protagonists from a much wider range of social classes, including students, apothecaries, merchants, lansquenets, priests, farmers, quack doctors, professors, and Jews. Finally, Italian Renaissance literature began to influence German writers, who quickly realized the literary triumph one could achieve by retelling some of the *novelle* for their own audiences.⁶⁰ Not surprisingly, their protagonists continue

⁵⁹ Schnyder, “Die Entdeckung des Begehrens,” 275.

⁶⁰ Ursula Kocher, *Boccaccio und die deutsche Novellistik: Formen der Transposition italienischer ‘novelle’ im 15. und 16. Jahrhundert*. Chloe. Beihefte zum Daphnis, 38 (Amsterdam and New York: Edition Rodopi, 2005). She does not, however, consider the genre of *Schwänke*.

to laugh at each other, ridiculing human folly and shortcomings, revealing hidden concerns and desires, hence continuing the epistemological strategies that were pursued by the *mære* authors. These *Schwänke* often picked up and followed the tradition as established by Boccaccio with his *Decameron* and Poggio Bracciolini with his *Facetiae*.⁶¹ Some of the most important German representatives publishing their *Schwänke* since the early sixteenth century were the Franciscan preacher Johannes Pauli (ca. 1450–after 1522) with his *Schimpf und Ernst*, the anonymous composer of *Eulenspiegel* (1510), the Colmar city clerk Jörg Wickram, who published his *Rollwagenbüchlein* in 1555, Jakob Frey with his *Die Garten Gesellschaft* (1557), Martin Montanus with his *Wegkürtzer* (1557), Michael Lindener with his *Katzipori* (1558) and his *Rastbüchlein* (1558), Valentin Schumann with his *Nachtbüchlein* (1559), and Hans Wilhelm Kirchhof with his *Wendunmuth* (1563–1603).⁶²

As all of these authors of *Schwänke* indicate either explicitly in their prologues or implicitly through the development and intention of the tales, these narratives served for the general entertainment and education, and hence regularly were predicated on laughter. It would require a whole book-length study to gain a solid understanding of this voluminous genre, so suffice it here, just as in the case of the corpus of *mæren*, to select a few examples to illustrate the strategies behind and purposes of laughter as outlined in the texts, illustrating in multifarious fashion essential concerns and problems determining late-medieval and early-modern society.⁶³

⁶¹ Regarding the international intertextuality of this entire genre within the European context, see Klaus Grubmüller, "Mittelalterliche Novellistik im europäischen Kontext: Die komparatistische Perspektive," *Mittelalterliche Novellistik*, 2006, 1–23.

⁶² Hermann Bausinger, "Schwank," *Enzyklopädie des Märchens*, ed. Rolf Wilhelm Brednich, vol. 12, 1 (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 2005), 318–32; Albrecht Classen, *Deutsche Schwankliteratur des 16. Jahrhunderts: Studien zu Martin Montanus, Hans Wilhelm Kirchhof und Michael Lindener*. Koblenz-Landauer Studien zu Geistes-, Kultur- und Bildungswissenschaften, 4 (Trier: WTV Verlag, 2009); id., "Witz, Humor, Satire: Georg Wickrams *Rollwagenbüchlein* als Quelle für sozialhistorische und mentalitätsgeschichtliche Studien zum 16. Jahrhundert, oder: Vom kommunikativen und gewalttätigen Umgang der Menschen in der Frühneuzeit," *Jahrbuch der ungarischen Germanistik* (1999): 13–30; Werner Röcke, "Fiktionale Literatur und literarischer Markt: Schwankliteratur und Prosaroman," *Die Literatur im Übergang vom Mittelalter zur Neuzeit*, ed. Werner Röcke and Marina Münkler. Hansers Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur vom 16. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart, 1 (Munich and Vienna: Hanser, 2004), 463–506; Elisabeth Wäghäll Nivre, *Women and Family Life in Early Modern Literature*. (Studies in German Literature, Linguistics, and Culture (Rochester, NY, and Woodbridge, Suffolk: D. S. Brewer, 2004); *Deutsche Schwankliteratur*, ed. Werner Wunderlich. Vol. I: *Vom frühen Mittelalter bis ins 16. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer, 1992).

⁶³ Leander Petzoldt, ed., *Deutsche Schwänke* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1979), offers an excellent broad selection of this genre, and also an extensive collection of relevant statements by major Germanist scholars on *Schwänke* (331–60); see also my monograph *Deutsche Schwankliteratur des 16. Jahrhunderts*.

Kirchhof, for instance, commented on his broader approach in writing his narratives in the following way:

solche gleichnus und fabeln richten nicht allein an (über tisch wo man sie erzelet) ergetzung und frölichkeit, sondern seyn auch nutz und nottwendig einem der mit vielen geschefften, schweren, ja auch bisweilen unnützen gedancken, zorn und trauwrigkeit, beladen, gleich wie seinem unwillenden magen ein guote und seltzame speiß, also sein gemüt (göttlichen trost unauffgegeben, vilmehr zuo vorderst genennet) erquicken und zuorecht bringen.⁶⁴

[such parables and narratives do not only bring about (when told at the dinner table) delight and happiness, but they are also of usefulness and necessary for someone with many occupations burdened by heavy, at times idle thoughts, wrath and sadness, just like good and exquisite food delight and heal an unwilling stomach (not to forget divine consolation which ought to be mentioned first.)]

Very much in the ancient Horation tradition, hence, Kirchhof underlines the combination of *delectare et prodesse*, an approach commonly pursued by other *Schwänke* authors. But this does not mean that the laughter that we can observe from time to time does not carry multiple meanings and invites us to probe much more deeply how a laughing protagonist interacts with his victims or his community. Surprisingly, however, the author at first offers numerous examples from classical-ancient literature in which bad examples illustrate the dangers resulting from tyranny. There will be, as in the previous discussion, a certain degree of randomness, but the intention is not directed at providing a full analysis of the genre per se, whereas the intriguing element of laughter assumes center position, whether an explosive burst of laughter, or a chuckle, or a snicker, or only an implied, silent laughter.

In the sixteenth century the overall military structure *opus moderandi* changed considerably which gave rise to the emergence of the lansquenets with their most colorful clothing and unique fighting spirit.⁶⁵ Kirchhof also served in such a unit for a long time and provides one very meaningful anecdote (“Ein höfliche antwort dises keisers”, I, no. 44; A Polite Response by this Emperor) about them in which the emperor’s laughter sheds light on the pleasant and also tragic conditions for those lansquenets.⁶⁶ When someone complains to the emperor that these soldiers

⁶⁴ Hans Wilhelm Kirchhof, *Wendunmuth*, ed. Hermann Österley. Bibliothek des Litterarischen Vereins in Stuttgart, XCV (1869; Hildesheim and New York: Georg Olms, 1980), vol. 1, 5. To avoid errors in the printing, I have written out all superscripta, which does not change at all the actual sound transcription of these diphthongs and umlauts.

⁶⁵ Jean-Denis G. G. Lepage, *Medieval Armies and Weapons in Western Europe: An Illustrated History* (Jefferson, NC, and London: McFarland & Company, 2005), 241–45. See also Jean-Paul Bourre, *Les Lansquenets: Un combat pour l’Empire. Vérités pour l’histoire* (Paris: Dualpha, 1999).

⁶⁶ Jean-Paul Burre, *Les Lansquenets*, 1999; Matthias Rogg, *Landsknechte und Reisläufer. Bilder vom Soldaten: ein Stand in der Kunst des 16. Jahrhunderts*. Krieg in der Geschichte, 5 (Paderborn, Munich,

should not be allowed to dress as sumptuously as those of nobility, Maximilian only laughs and responds: “Ach, was narriichten bekümmerns ist das? gönnet in doch für ir unselig und kümmerlich leben ein wenig freud und ergetzlichkeit! sie müssen offmals, wenn ir dahinden steht, den kopff zerstoßen” (I, 53; What foolish concern that is! Grant them a little joy and happiness in return for their unholy and miserable life. Many times they have to crack their heads when you are standing in the background). Moreover, drawing from a kind of a proverb, the emperor adds: “es ist der speck auff der fallen, darmit man solche meiß fahet” (53; it is the bacon on the trap with which the mice are being caught).

His facetious remark drastically undermines those who dare to criticize the egregious new fashion which seems to transgress all traditional sumptuary laws and competes with the pompous behavior of the aristocrats, who thus also become the butt of the joke. Nevertheless, Maximilian adds a sorrowful note to his response, reflecting on the life-threatening work being done by these ultimately miserable mercenaries. His laughter attacks those who believe that they should be the only ones privileged to wear such brilliant clothing appropriate for their social class, while the lansquenets only pretend to be equally powerful and worthy of public respect because they regularly grab any kind of prey wherever they can find it. But ultimately, as his further remarks clearly indicate, these poor creatures deserve some little and meaningless joy in their lives which they have to give up in the war dying in great numbers as cannon fodder, so to speak, whereas the aristocrats hide behind their backs. Moreover, the emperor also expresses great pity for these mercenaries insofar as he recognizes in them nothing but the bacon in a mousetrap.

Although this *Schwank*, as is common in this genre, is predicated on witticism and general humor, the narrative is also determined by a sense of melancholy and ethical concerns for those who have to die in war. After all, as Maximilian emphasizes, why would the lansquenets’ spectacular appearance concern anyone, considering how ephemeral all those material goods turn out to be in face of the life-and-death situation of war, tragically a most common experience especially in the sixteenth century.⁶⁷ To get incensed because of such foolish behavior seems to be, according to the emperor, most laughable and contemptible, so the true butt of the joke suddenly are not the lansquenets, who would, in reality, have to be pitied for their misguided thinking and their victimization at the hands of the great

et al.: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2002).

⁶⁷ *Violence in Medieval Courtly Literature: A Casebook*, ed. Albrecht Classen. Routledge Medieval Casebooks (New York and London: Routledge, 2004); Horst Brunner et al., *Dulce bellum inexpertis: Bilder des Krieges in der deutschen Literatur des 15. und 16. Jahrhunderts*. *Imagines Medii Aevi*, 11 (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2002); *War and Peace in the Middle Ages*, ed. Brian Patrick McGuire (Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzel, 1987).

lords, but the nobles who abuse those mercenaries for their own ends and do not even want to grant them the least bit of worldly joy and happiness.

By laughing out loud the Emperor distances himself strategically from the nobles who dare to criticize the lansquenets, and he assumes, intriguingly, a highly humanistic position with regard to human suffering in war. Insofar as he laughs, Maximilian creates space where opinions can circulate freely and where the traditional power structure is opened up to public debate independent of political pressures.

In a very different situation, Kirchhof relates of a worthy man about to die ("Von einem herrn, der am todtbeth lag," I, no. 51; Of a Lord who was Lying on his Deathbed) and whom his friends and the priest admonish to give his confession, to forgive all his enemies, especially those who had insulted him during his life. The old man, however, sarcastically rejects that insinuation, reprimanding them that they should have told him so while he had still been in good health because it would take him at least half a year and more to comply with their wishes: "Denckt selbst! es ist nun zuospat gewartet" (62; Think for yourself! The waiting has taken too long). Those who have listened to his answer at first display their horror about such blasphemous language, but they also laugh about the curt reply and his rambunctiousness and spunk even in face of death. Their laughter then eases the tension, and they jokingly remark that he would not have to travel around everywhere to forgive his opponents. All that he would need to do would be to confess to God that he has freed his heart from all hatred and envy, otherwise he would not be allowed to enter Heaven.

But they have not reckoned with his deft humor and resolute defiance, which finds astonishing expression in the following lines: "Ir seyt narren miteinander; wo wolt ich sonst hinfahren? Ich glaub, ir meinet gott habe den himmel den wölfen gemacht. Schweigt nur still! ich kehr mich an euwer rede gar nichts" (62; You are all fools! Where else should I travel? I think you believe that God has created Heaven for the wolves. Be quiet, I do not care about whatever you might say). Soon thereafter he dies, having uttered a number of other statements in the same vein, which the narrator obviously regards as most inappropriate, expressing his great disapproval in the final epimythion. Here he admonishes his audience to do penance while they are still well, to pray to God that He will not withhold His help in the last hour, and that He will protect the individual from the devil's cunning. Kirchhof concludes: "Wer aber gott zum beistand hat, / Deß teuffels list nit findet statt" (62; He who has God as his helper will not be the victim of the devil's cunning).

The narrative itself, however, speaks a very different language, especially because the dying man indicates his criticism of the teachings of the Church, of the psychological strategy to make everyone fear the afterlife and hence to make them

submissive under the priest's commands, and of the common belief that Heaven is preserved only for a select group of people. His most disrespectful remark powerfully reflects on the ideological strategy pursued by the Church to force all Christians to be obedient and accept the clergy as the highest authority.⁶⁸ Although Kirchhof was a Protestant, and although he relates this anecdote with the intention to entertain, he apparently felt highly uncomfortable with the implied message and hastily added the epimythion as a countermeasure. Nevertheless, the old man's curt statements, determined by his ridicule of the practice of confessing before death, and the company's laughter in response indicate how much the authority of the Church was no longer fully accepted. Even though the man does not laugh out loud, his comments represent an explicitly facetious perspective and are intended to ridicule the priest, whereas the audience laughs out of deference and intimidation, afraid that they might become victims of the same conviction voiced by the protagonist. Not surprisingly, he characterizes them as "narren" (62; fools) and never deviates from his position until his death. Moreover, his resolute and harsh rejection of all their pleadings makes them shut their mouths, which allows him to die peacefully. The narrator does not condemn him, but he also does not seem to understand him either, which represents a most amazing situation in literary history where the text itself exposes the author's ignorance and lack of understanding. By rejecting all the by-standers and their simple-minded belief in the highly selective process by which God would chose those who are entitled to enter Heaven, the dying man in reality laughs at them all and proves to be superior to them in every respect. Their own laughter, on the other hand, reflects a sheepish response to his almost heretical opinion about the afterlife and his own claim on a place in Heaven. They laugh in the hope thereby to subterfuge his biting criticism and radical disillusionment: "Sie erschracken dieser seltsamen antwort, mußten ir doch lachen" (62; They were frightened about this strange answer, yet they had to laugh about it).

Ultimately, obviously even contrary to the author's intention, there are two types of laughter at play, the first, by the dying man, as an expression of his independent mind and self-assuredness even in face of death, the other, by the friends and family, a reflection of their insecurity and fear of the severe threats by the Church about the punishment of evil deeds and thoughts in this life.

A very different scenario emerges in "Ein juncker wil ein kauffmann verspotten" (I, no. 69; A Young Nobleman Wants to Mock a Merchant) where laughter serves the purpose to ridicule the representative of a different social class. In a tavern a

⁶⁸ This is insightfully discussed by Peter Dinzelbacher, *Angst im Mittelalter: Teufels-, Todes- und Gotteserfahrung: Mentalitätsgeschichte und Ikonographie* (Paderborn, Munich, et al.: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1996).

drinking company once includes also a merchant and a nobleman. The latter tries to ridicule all merchants as cuckolds and facetiously laments their destiny to have to travel far and wide and thus to be forced to leave their wives behind, making them to easy prey of young noblemen. Aristocratic women, on the other hand, live in castles, normally safely removed from urban centers, hence well protected from any dangerous sexual temptations. The merchant cannot easily defend himself against such insinuations, but he then simply retorts the insult with the counter example. Arguing along the same lines as the nobleman, the merchant points out how much the noble women are regularly left alone by their husbands, and since there are only male servants present, who then tend to seduce the wives, the end result proves to be ugly progeny: "darumb denn sovill heßlicher, nährischer und schwartzer edelleut in der welt seyn" (89; for that reason there are so many ugly, foolish, and dark-skinned aristocrats in the world). Since the opponent is not given any opportunity to defend himself or to retort, the merchant seems to have those among the audience who laugh with him about the other social class on his side. Laughing thus signals a social conflict that is carried out by means of words and witticism.⁶⁹

One of the most brilliant *Schwänke* (pl.) ever written deals with the wife of an apothecary who is away from his business: "Ein recept einer apoteckerin" (I, no. 111; The Recipe of a Female Apothecary). Drawing on a very old trope concerning an old man who marries a young woman but then cannot satisfy her sexually,⁷⁰ the narrator invites his audience first of all to laugh about this fool: "als er sie nun genommen und wenig zeit mit ir haußgehalten, muß er leiden, daß sie im sein schwach und unvermögentlich alter, auch wie er deß nachts nichts denn schlaffen oder hûsten und kotzen köndte, gantz schmechlich auffruckte und fürwarff" (143; once he had married her and had lived together with her, he had to suffer the shame that she terribly accused him and reprimanded him that he could do nothing at night but to sleep, cough, or spit). The old husband soon realizes what she really wants, and in his embarrassment he turns to the apothecary for help. We would say that he is looking for Viagra to regain his sexual potency. However, the apothecary is not present, so his wife offers her service and claims that she would

⁶⁹ Elfriede Moser-Rath, *Lustige Gesellschaft. Schwank und Witz des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts in kultur- und sozialgeschichtlichem Kontext* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1984), 57–60, et passim.

⁷⁰ See the contributions to *Old Age in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: Interdisciplinary Approaches to a Neglected Topic*, ed. Albrecht Classen. *Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture*, 2 (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2007); and to *Alterskulturen des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit: Internationaler Kongress Krems an der Donau 16. bis 18. Oktober 2006*, ed. Elisabeth Vavra. Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften. Philosophisch-historische Klasse. Sitzungsberichte, 780. Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Realienkunde des Mittelalters und der Frühen Neuzeit, 21 (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2008).

be competent enough to help him. After a bit of coaxing he finally reveals to her what he is suffering from, and she immediately invites him into the shop to find out whether there might be a remedy for him.

Before proceeding with his account, the narrator emphasizes how beautiful and attractive she appears, and then relates that she pulled up her skirt to some extent, asking him whether the sight of her naked legs might have had any (erotic) effect on him. He denies this completely, perhaps not even understanding what she means, which forces her to climb up the ladder, pretending to look for some medication for him in the drawers higher up. When he still denies that this situation has brought about any change in him, creating some kind of sexual excitement, she pulls her skirt up to her knees, and inquires another time about his reaction. But there is none, and when he remarks that since she would not know of any remedy for his ailment, he would have to wait for her husband's return. But she satirically comments: "Ohn not is das, sag sie, wenn euch das, so ir ietund gesehen, kein kraft bringt, ist es vergeblich, wenn ihr auch schon die gantze apothecken mit allen büchsen fresset" (143; There is no need for that, she said, because if that what you have seen now does not give you any strength, it will all be to no avail, even if you were to swallow the entire apothecary with all its boxes). The narrator only comments that his audience would certainly be capable of imagining the horror that the man must have felt upon her remarks (143).

No one is really laughing here, yet the entire *Schwank* is certainly predicated on comedy insofar as the old man is exposed as a fool; the young woman plays the devil's advocate and carefully exposes parts of her lower body to his view, and even climbs up the ladder to allow him even better sight from below. Nevertheless, none of her strategies can arouse him sexually, so she knows, and the audience knows as well, that he is impotent and cannot be helped even with the best medicine. Laughter is the intended goal of this narrative, based on ridicule, satire, and contempt of old and rich men who believe that they can buy sexual happiness with money when their own bodies have already long forsaken them. Another type of laughter, however, rewards the intelligent and witty woman apothecary who understands so much better than any male doctor would what the old man's true ailment consists of because she utilizes her own sexualized body as a gauge to measure the degree to which there is any erotic potency left in him. Finally, she is very clear in her conclusion and rejects, in an ironic twist, even the pretended skills of apothecaries who are believed to possess medication that might restore an old man's sexual libido against all odds.

Although no one laughs explicitly, this tale is predicated on rather complex types of laughter directed at foolish old men, and supporting intelligent young women who are fully aware of their own sexual attractiveness and know well how to utilize it for their clever interaction with male customers. The apothecary's wife impresses us both with her intelligence and expertise in the world of pharmacy

(whether based on truth or only the result of good acting), and her beauty, but she also displays considerable abilities to interact with the old customer and to convince him to reveal the truth of his concern. Ultimately, with her sarcastic comment regarding the effectiveness, or rather lack thereof, of all the medication in the shop, she laughs not only about the old man, but also about the profession of apothecaries at large, and even about people in general who naively believe in the magical power of pharmaceutical drugs with which all ailments and other problems can allegedly be dealt with effectively. As she knows only too well as a woman, and as a wife on top of it, if a man no longer finds female bodies attractive, and cannot get aroused when he can see some naked flesh, then artificial stimuli are all useless and a waste of money.

Although the epimythion explicitly addresses old men who foolishly dare to marry young women and then cannot satisfy them sexually, which arouses specific contemptible laughter, the female apothecary's witticism really carries the day because she humorously triumphs over the old and rich man who had ridiculed her own gender when he married the young woman. She exposes his hypocrisy, his impotence, and his hubris, and by the same token, though only in a sly, she also undermines the pretenses of the entire profession of apothecaries.⁷¹

Another intriguing and most powerful dimension of laughter comes to the fore in the first *Schwank* printed in Michael Lindener's *Rastbüchlein* (1558), an anthology that contains many narratives borrowed from the same literary sources or that pursue the same satirical agenda. We have to be mindful, however, that the author definitely predicated his tales considerably more on the sexual, pornographic, and scatological, whatever those terms might really mean in the context of sixteenth-century German culture.⁷² But Lindener also injected a strong sense of linguistic humor into his tales, as best illustrated in the first one, "Wie ein grosser Herr ein ordnung hielt / vber dem Tisch / der ein Freytafel hette" (How a Great Lord, Who Offered Free Meals, Observed a Specific Order at Dinner).⁷³ The narrator refers to

⁷¹ I have dealt with this topic already several times elsewhere: "Witz, Humor, Satire. Georg Wickrams *Rollwagenbüchlein* als Quelle für sozialhistorische und mentalitätsgeschichtliche Studien zum 16. Jahrhundert"; cf. also my article "Transgression and Laughter, the Scatological and the Epistemological: New Insights into the Pranks of Till Eulenspiegel," *Medievalia et Humanistica* 33 (2007): 41–61; and "Laughter as the Ultimate Epistemological Vehicle in the Hands of Till Eulenspiegel," *Neophilologus* 92 (2008): 417–89.

⁷² Michael Lindener, *Schwankbücher: Rastbüchlein und Katzipori*, ed. Kyra Heidemann. 2 vols. (Bern, Berlin, et al.: Peter Lang, 1991), vol. 1: *Texte*. Heidemann leaves no spaces between the virgels and the words before and after, but the common practice is to separate it with one space on both sides, which I apply here. For a broad discussion of the meaning of sexuality and correlated topics, see my "Introduction: The Cultural Significance of Sexuality in the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and Beyond . . .," *Sexuality in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Times*, ed. Albrecht Classen.

⁷³ Peter C. M. Dieckow, "Um jetzt der Katzenborischen art Rollwagenbücher zu gedenken – Zur

a most generous lord who greatly enjoys fun, jokes, and witty stories, hence *Schwänke*. But one day these two are engaged in a discussion, in which the lord informs the narrator about the rules at his dinner table, insisting that no one should say a word about the “Menschwerdung” (1; creation of man). Puzzled about the true meaning of this word, the narrator inquires further and is then informed that it means “Kindermachen” (1; making of children); hence simply ‘sex.’

The narrator himself laughs heartily about this foolish shyness and then entertains his audience with a hilarious, practically not translatable list of alternative terms for sexual intercourse: “Stropurtzlen / Ficken / Nobisen / Raudi / Maudi / Schirimiri” (2).⁷⁴ The flood of terms offered by the narrator indicates a deep sense of linguistic enjoyment about the richness of the human language, especially in the area of taboo topics, whether some of these words imply ‘screwing,’ ‘chopping hamburger meat,’ ‘chopping wood,’ or ‘searching for lice.’⁷⁵

In “Ein Kauffmann klopft seiner Frawen auf dem Beckin / biß jme sie ein anderer etc. pundtschuochet” (no. 4; A Merchant Hits on the Cymbals for His Wife Until Another Man Cuckolds Him) a merchant’s wife is willing to sleep with a young man, also a merchant, and arranges the tryst in such a way that first he has to pay her forty florins and then is allowed to hide in her house so that they both can meet later and enjoy each other. At night she tells her husband that she needs to use the bathroom, but feels scared in the darkness. Upon her request he hits a bronze gong the whole time during her absence, not knowing that she is actually sleeping with the lover. Ironically, the next day the young merchant relates the entire story to a group of men with whom he enjoys a mid-morning refreshment, unaware that the poor husband is among the crowd. For the lover the situation had been most hilarious, as he emphasizes to his audience, since the cuckolded merchant had voluntarily played the music while he himself had slept with the wife. Everyone greatly enjoys this funny account and laughs about the foolish victim of adultery, and they collectively praise the young man for his courage and bravery in this delightful sexual affair.

However, the duped husband understands only too well that he had been the butt of the joke, yet he keeps it a secret, demonstrating impressive self-discipline.

Erforschung deutschsprachiger Prosaerzählsammlungen aus der zweiten Hälfte des 16. Jahrhunderts,” *Euphorion* 90.1 (1996): 76–133.

⁷⁴ For a philological analysis of many of the words uniquely used by Lindener, or at least most typically for the sixteenth century, see the commentary by Kyra Heidemann, vol. 2, 53–177; here 56–57. I will not repeat her explanations and content myself with this one time reference.

⁷⁵ This was a strong tendency in late-medieval literature, especially in Shrovetide plays and *Schwänke*, see Johannes Müller, *Schwert und Scheide: der sexuelle und skatologische Wortschatz im Nürnberger Fastnachtspiel des 15. Jahrhunderts*. Deutsche Literatur von den Anfängen bis 1700, 2 (Bern and New York: Peter Lang, 1988).

Instead he invites his competitor home, who gladly and unwittingly follows him until they reach the door, which the young man recognizes full of horror. Although he now tries to escape, the husband holds him tightly and forces him to come with him and to confront his wife. He immediately demands from her the money or payment, which she has to deliver, of which only a small amount is already missing. In a most dramatic turn of events, the old merchant then addresses his competitor: "Nymme hin deine viertzig Floren" (15; take your forty florins). Facing his wife, he yells at her: "vnnd du Huor den Creützer / den du daruon verthon hast / das sey dein lohn / dann ainer Huoren nicht mehr als ain Creützer gebürt" (15; and you whore, take the penny that you spent, that may be your reward because a whore does not deserve more than a Kreutzer [smaller coin]).⁷⁶

The young man is then allowed to leave with his money, while the old merchant gives his wife a severe beating to prevent that she will ever do such a "Bossen" (15; jokes) to her husband again. Deep misogyny and crude disrespect for women combine here to entertain the audience, which is invited to laugh with the group of merchants about the one poor victim amongst them who was so foolish to accompany his own wife's adultery with the banging of the gong, not knowing how much first she, then the young man, made him to the butt of the joke. Of course, the outcome is highly aggressive and painful for the wife who is thus forced into absolute submission under her husband. Nevertheless, both the audience and the company of men who are entertained with this hilarious story about the ingenious tryst enjoy the account and laugh about the foolish husband who proves to be, together with his wife, the true victim. The young lover carries the victory threefold, having enjoyed sex with the wife, having gained admiration and applause for his story and his daredevil maneuver with the merchant's wife, and having recovered his money from the cuckolded husband after all.

Lindener has been repeatedly accused of dabbling in scatology, hence of having transgressed the ultimate limits of decency and morality.⁷⁷ One specific example

⁷⁶ For medieval currencies, see Peter Spufford, *Handbook of Medieval Exchange*. Royal Historical Society Guides and Handbooks (London: Offices of the Royal Historical Society, 1986), 93–94.

⁷⁷ Karl Schottenloher, "Michael Lindener, ein verkommener Poet und Buchführer aus dem 16. Jahrhundert," *Börsenblatt für den Deutschen Buchhandel* 95 (1928): 117–20; more recent scholars have simply reiterated his comments, see, for instance, Werner Röcke, "Schwanksammlung und Schwankroman," *Von der Handschrift zum Buchdruck: Spätmittelalter, Reformation, Humanismus. 1320–1572*, ed. Ingrid Bennewitz and Ulrich Müller (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1991), 180–95; here 192. Curiously, Röcke not only pursues surprisingly traditional viewpoints, but also seems to misread the basic purpose of laughter in many of the *Schwänke*, characterizing it simplistically as the result of an astonishment about the richness and variety of reality ("Erstaunen über die bunte Fülle und Vielfalt der Welt"). With the help of his great and otherwise certainly deserved scholarly authority, Max Wehrli condemns Lindener as a disgusting and worthless

would be the *Schwank* “Ein grosses Schiessen welchs imm Ynthal / zur zeyt Keyser Maximilians / geschehen ist” in his *Katzipori* (no. 1, 71–72; A Great Shooting Match that Took Place in the Inn Valley During the time of Emperor Maximilian). But here as well as in other examples we have always to question whether the transgressive elements serve for their own purpose, or whether the transgression aims for quite different goals. After all, what we consider as obscene might not have been regarded as such in previous societies, just as laughter and jokes today would have to be evaluated differently than those mentioned in premodern texts.⁷⁸

In this narrative a stranger ridicules everyone at a target shooting festival in their argument over who might truly be the best marksman in this sport. While they fight over whether those from Nuremberg or those from Augsburg might win the competition, the stranger claims to know the very best of them all, though he refuses for a long time to reveal the name or to give away his identity. Everyone expresses great anger and frustration with his assumed arrogance and the secrecy, but the stranger at first indicates that he might attract all their animosity once he would have named the miracle marksman. Finally, once he has been assured their tolerance, he identifies, to all their utter surprise and shock the ass which would never fail in hitting the goal. The explanation proves to be as accurate as transgressive and deserves to be quoted here at length: “Dann so bald der poltz von der sehnen kommet / das ist / der dreck zum loch herauß dringet / alßbald ist er in der nasen / das will ich mit euch allen bewert haben” (72; As soon as the bolt has been released from the bowstring, that is, once the dirt has come out of the hole, it immediately hits the nose; that is what I wanted to prove to you).

Instead of evoking their protests, however, everyone breaks out in great laughter and pays him their respect because he has spoken the undeniable truth, though he had slightly changed the meaning of ‘shooting’ and transferred it to the world of smells and bodily odor.⁷⁹ Insofar as this jester pointed out one of the most basic

writers, Max Wehrli, *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur im Mittelalter. Von den Anfängen bis zum Ende des 16. Jahrhunderts*. 3rd revised ed. (in terms of the bibliography). *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur*, 1 (1980; Stuttgart: Reclam, 1997, orig. 1980), S. 1134.

⁷⁸ *Medieval Obscenities*, ed. Nicola McDonald (Woodbridge, Suffolk, und Rochester: York Medieval Press, 2006); *Obscenity: Social Control and Artistic Creation in the European Middle Ages*, ed. Jan M. Ziolkowski. *Cultures, Beliefs and Tradition*, 4 (Leiden: Brill, 1998); Wolf-Dieter Stempel, “Mittelalterliche Obszönität als literarästhetisches Problem,” *Die nicht mehr schönen Künste: Grenzphänomene des Ästhetischen*, ed. Hans-Robert Jauß. *Poetik und Hermeneutik*, III (Munich: Fink, 1968), 187–205.

⁷⁹ See, for instance, C. M. Woolgar, *The Senses in Late Medieval England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006); Valerie Allen, *On Farting*, 2007; Susan Signe Morrison, *Excrement in the late Middle Ages: Sacred Filth and Chaucer's Fecopoetic* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); see also the contributions to *Fecal Matters in Early Modern Literature and Art: Studies in Scatology*, ed. Jeff Persels and Russell Ganim. *Studies in European Cultural Transition*, 21 (Aldershot, Hampshire, and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004); see also my study “Farting and the Power of Human Language, with a Focus on Hans Wilhelm Kirchhof's

bodily function, he had undermined and ridiculed their entire competition and made the company laugh out loud. Instead of determining the one and only champion in this sport of shooting, he had alerted them to the fact that all of them share the same human properties and would not need to fight against each other, considering that they are all the same kind of creature.

Lindener has developed a brilliant joke in this narrative, intriguingly playing on the imagery of target shooting and transferring it from the concrete aiming at a goal with bow and arrow, or bolt and crossbow, to the rapidly expanding nasty smell of feces that everyone notices as soon as it has left the intestines. The attendees of the tournament laugh, so it seems, because their ridiculous competition, bragging, arguing, and presumptuous behavior is suddenly deflated and made to nought because the reference to excrement as the best (olfactory) marksman, at least in terms of the smell hitting the nose, cannot be refuted. Everyone is so delighted about this witty remark that they honor the jester, pay him several drinks, and then have the account recorded in a chronicle: "Dann er wol werdt waere / daß sein Ehrlich vnnd hoch gedacht / vnd ewig blibe" (72; since he [the jester] was certainly honorable enough to be remembered and praised for ever). Lindener insists on the veracity of his account and reprimands the contemporary chroniclers for having ignored this event. He identifies the report about this surprising development at the tournament as a "Kunststücklein" (72; a little piece of art) that should not be forgotten again. Insofar as everyone had laughed and then had recognized the stranger's cleverness, they also stopped their bickering and arrogant struggle to know best who might be the best marksman.

Laughter, and in this case about both the witty story within our *Schwank* and also about the realization of the very physical nature of human life, ended hostility and aggression, avoided possible fighting, and created a community of joyful sportsmen who all happily participate in the festivities after the jester has brought their silly arguments to an end.

A similar example for literary comedy predicated on the experience with feces can be found in "Ein kindische antwort / von ainem Toechterlein / zehen Jar allt / gegeben" (no. 27, 93; A Childish Response by a Young Girl, Ten Years Old). Here a overweight priest attends a great festivity organized by a burgher with the name Valentin Strasser in Bamberg. The narrator explicitly comments how much the priest has overeaten and is also pretty much drunk, and in this situation he begins to have short breath. While digesting, he suddenly belches loudly in front of everyone without expressing any embarrassment. The ten-year old daughter observes the disgusting priest and comments in a carefree manner that he will probably vomit soon on the table. When the priest then gets up to release himself

outside, he loudly farts before he has even left the room. Again, the girl sarcastically remarks on this: “Was aber auß dem dicken bauch nit kan / das muß vnten hynauß / Er hat sich also eingefüllt der grosse Pfaf / wirt endlich noch heüt in die hosen scheysen / O wirdt er ein gestanck machen in der stuben / lieben leüt” (93; What cannot get out of the fat stomach must leave from below. The big [fat?] priest has stuffed himself so much that he will at the end shit into his pants today. Oh, he will create a great smell in the room, my dear folks).

As crude and scatological this all proves to be, her youth and innocence provide her with the necessary protection to say her mind and ridicule the glutinous priest, describing him in no other terms but as a vile body, filled with food, liquids, and excrements. As simple as her statement might sound, she has nevertheless drastically exposed the cleric and decried him in his lack of self-control and education. No wonder that this young girl evokes general laughter: “Macht also den gesten ain grosses gelächter” (93).

There is no doubt that Lindener utilizes obscene language and imagery, but the purpose is to criticize people in their social, moral, and ethical shortcomings and to deflate those who claim more authority than belongs to them. The priest truly proves to be an outsider who deserves the scorn from the rest of the company, but only the girl dares to speak up and say what they all think secretly. By pointing out how much he has become a victim of his own body, in- and digesting, belching, farting, and shitting, she has deconstructed all his priestly reputation and proves to be only a human creature like all of them. Not surprisingly, their laughter represents a deep sense of relief about the end of all of this clerical pretense and also reflects the ordinary persons’ triumph over the authority figure insofar as he reveals involuntarily his very earthly nature.

Let us come to a conclusion since there is almost an infinite number of further examples in this huge corpus of *Schwänke* where laughter erupts and people interact with each other by way of ridicule, satire, irony, and sarcasm. Inasmuch as this large corpus of entertaining narratives reflects on the widest gamut of people from all social classes, age groups, and genders, the dominant focus on laughter reveals how much this human phenomenon really occupies the center of all social activities and serves as a most important vehicle to cope with tensions, conflicts, miscommunication, and general differences. The various authors of *Schwänke*, despite having been somewhat ignored by literary historians, prove to be at times brilliant in their ability to relate a story and to profile curious, stupid, ignorant, foolish, or simply duped and cuckolded protagonists.

Significantly, laughter erupts both among the audiences within the tales as well as among the external audiences, hence us. Individual figures laugh about others, either in triumph or in the realization that they themselves have made a major

mistake. Laughter carries prophetic power, or it serves to hide deeply-seated secrets. At any rate, both the *mæren* and the *Schwänke* demonstrate their greatest strength in their intriguing employment and exploration of laughter through which essential aspects of human life (love, hatred, fear, sexual desire, insecurity, etc.) come to the fore and invite public scrutiny. Although laughter in these late-medieval and early-modern texts is often associated with obscenities, pornography, and scatology, they demonstrate a certain degree of literary brilliance, especially because the power of laughter transcends their historical boundaries and carries over even until today. The analysis of laughter thus proves to be fundamental in the effort to gain insight into human nature and the structure of society. The gender relationships are as much identifiable by way of the interpretation of laughter as the specific make up of individual communities.⁸⁰

Both Lindener and Kirchhof, but so already Poggio Bracciolini and Boccaccio good hundred to two hundred years before them argued in favor of comedy as a natural and healthy matter. In Lindener's words:

So sein zuo solchem / kurtzweilige vnd laecherliche Schwenck vnd bossen dienstlich / welche wie Hypocras schreibet / die leber frischen / vnd das gebluet erquicken / vnd gleych vernewern / darauff ein trüncklein auß einem weysen Venedischen Glaß / da ein maß Roterwein eingeht / wol vnnd nattürlich schmecket" (*Rastbuechlein*, 4)

[Such entertaining and funny narratives and jokes are useful for the purpose, as Hippocrates writes, to refreshen the liver, to enliven the blood and to renew it, whereupon a little drink from a white Venetian glass, in which half a gallon red wine fits, tastes well and naturally.]

Finally, to quote Poggio, one of the fathers, so to speak, of this entire genre of entertaining late-medieval narratives, "It is a proper and almost necessary thing, indeed commended by the wise, that our minds, oppressed with various concerns and troubles, be relieved on occasion from cares and be diverted towards mirth and relaxation by sort of amusement."⁸¹

⁸⁰ Werner Wunderlich, "Zu den epischen Merkmalen des Schwanks," id., ed., *Deutsche Schwankliteratur* (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer, 1992), Vol. II, 216: "Durch das Lachen indes wird auch die Ordnung, die durch ein lasterhaftes, närrisches Verhalten verletzt wurde, wieder hergestellt. Das Komische und Lächerliche heben eben auch die Fragwürdigkeit und die Hinfälligkeit mancher Ordnung erst ins Bewusstsein" (By way of laughing the social order, which was injured through a vicious, foolish behavior, is restored again. The comic and ridiculous, however, also elevate onto the level of awareness the dubious nature and vanity of many kinds of order).

⁸¹ Quoted from *Eroticism and Love in the Middle Ages*, ed. Albrecht Classen. Sixth ed. (1994; Mason, OH: Cengage Learning, 2008), 577. But see also Poggius Bracciolini, *Opera Omnia*. Con una premessa di Riccardo Fubini. Vol. 1: *Scripta in editione Basilensi anno MDXXXVIII collata [1538]*. Monumenta politica et philosophica rariora, 2, 4–6 (Turin: Bottega d'Erasmus, 1964), 420–91. The English translation by Bernhardt J. Hurwood, *The Facetiae of Giovanni Francesco Poggio Bracciolini*. A New Translation (New York and London: Award Books, 1968), does not include the important prologue.

But we have also observed that laughter achieves considerably more than to provide simple and superficial entertainment. By laughing the literary protagonists—and so we as the audience or the readers—gain new insights into the complexities of their existence, the contingency of human life, and the shortcomings of people on a daily basis. In other words, laughing carries a tremendous hermeneutic function and deserves greatest attention because it reveals so much what has remained hidden in the text, or the image, sculpture, or musical composition. Laughter bursts forth, hence destroys the mask, unless it is the result of a deliberate strategy to deceive the other, and so lays bare the laughing person's inner thinking or feeling. It also signals that an unconscious thinking process has set in concerning conditions or constellations that had not been imagined before. The knight's laughter in the verse narrative reveals his secret feelings and attitudes, and in a way liberates him from the constraints of aristocratic society. Similarly, the laughter in the *Schwänke* regularly initiates most significant epistemological processes and makes possible to perceive the truth behind all pretenses.

Chapter 20

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The Workings of Desire: Panurge and the Dogs

The assault on the body of the Lady of Paris in chapter twenty-two of *Pantagruel*¹ by François Rabelais, the sixteenth-century French Humanist (born between the years 1483 and 1494 and died in 1553), is a misogynist episode made famous by generations of male readers. In this grotesque farce a vengeful Panurge, unable to seduce a woman of higher social standing, and in spite of his previous sexual prowess with women, stages a mise-en-scene to humiliate her during the religious office of Corpus Christi. He transfers his desire onto a multitude of dogs by discreetly spreading, on the woman's luxurious dress, the ashes of a female dog in heat² he had previously killed, quartered, and burned. The woman's body, subjected to the malicious marking, arouses the immediate attraction of numerous dogs present in the house of worship, which proceed to urinate all over her. The proud countenance she had displayed when entering the church ends in a hasty and shameful flight as she is chased by an increasing pack of hounds, eventually numbering 600,014.

While Panurge effectively succeeds in ridiculing her in front of a bemused crowd of worshippers, he also casts doubts on how effectively he is able to assert "masculine domination"³ and exercise the power that his gender embodies in sixteenth-century France. The performance that takes places in a sacred setting not

¹ Guy Demerson, ed., *Rabelais Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Seuil, 1995). All subsequent quotations from this edition will be cited parenthetically; *The Mansion* (1960) by William Faulkner, chapter thirteen is inspired by this episode.

² In the first edition of *Pantagruel* (Paris: Presses de Denis Janot, 1537), Rabelais uses the term 'a female dog in heat,' but in the edition of 1542, he uses a Greek term "lycisme orgoase." See also Elizabeth Chesney-Zegura ed., *The Rabelais Encyclopedia* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004).

³ Pierre Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, trans. Richard Nice (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001).

only ridicules the Lady and parodies the feast of the Host, but also ultimately exposes the trickster's weaknesses in spite of his apparent triumph. Neither Panurge nor the *Haulte Dame* come out unscathed in the well-crafted and multi-layered episode Rabelais offers us under the auspices of a vulgar practical joke.

Pantagruel, *Gargantua*, and the three subsequent volumes, tell in a fictional narrative the mock adventures of giants from the folklore. The comic in these books combines comedy and satire, scatology and play with language in order to attack social institutions, especially the church and the university. Rabelais's attacks on different fronts resulted in the condemnation of the five books by the Sorbonne, the Parliament of Paris, and the Vatican, which added them to the index of forbidden books. His work is difficult to classify, occupying a unique place in sixteenth-century French literature. Rabelais's novels in many ways still owe to medieval oral tradition by his frequent use of obscene and sacrilegious jokes, puns, wordplay, and symbols, but also by his utilization of exempla, fabliau-type characters, and marvelous tales, common aspects of medieval literature. But in spite of his numerous borrowings from the Middle Ages, Rabelais, like many writers of his time, also uses paradox, irony, and ambiguity, displaying a great knowledge and familiarity with classical authors, and especially with Lucian in reference to humor.⁴ In that sense, Rabelais is a Renaissance writer, but since he also incorporates characteristics of the medieval period in his writings, he stands at the juncture of the two periods.

The farcical mechanisms that Rabelais exploits in this episode, combined with elements from the popular tradition, create a scene that at first seems to be simply another misogynist joke. However, mocking the lady constitutes only one layer of possible interpretations of this chapter. It is important to note that although the farce thrusts the woman into the center of attention during a religious service, Rabelais's underlying intention is certainly more complex than it appears and as scholars have previously suggested, particularly because this episode can be read as another attack against the Church. Indeed, as he ridicules the *Haulte Dame*, he is also satirizing the exemplarity of the transubstantiation, one of the dogmas that the Reformation called into question. In sixteenth-century France, the Reformed called Evangelicals were more divided into a variety of small groups of individuals than in Germany and Switzerland.⁵

Corpus Christi was the object of a religious controversy in the sixteenth century; Evangelicals were questioning the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist.⁶ Since

⁴ See Christopher Robinson, *Lucian and his Influence in Europe* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979).

⁵ Lucien Febvre, *Le Problème de l'incroyance au XVI^e siècle: la Religion de Rabelais* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1942).

⁶ Philippe Martin. *Les Chemins du sacré* (Metz: Editions Serpenoise, 1995), 17.

the Eucharist exemplifies the fusion between the sacred and the carnal, Evangelicals considered this festival a pagan celebration.⁷ By means of a vulgar joke, Rabelais is in fact replacing the body of Christ with the body of a humiliated woman sullied by dog's urine. The joke turns very quickly the performance of the religious celebration into a scatological derision. The spirituality of the feast of the Host is superimposed by a bestial scene that links the woman to a hyperbolic number of dogs. This satire, as François Rigolot proposes in his examination of the evangelical intertext of this episode, "has not attracted much comment even though the revival of Christian Humanism and evangelical thinking greatly influenced Rabelais's work."⁸ This apparently 'inoffensive' joke functioned as a powerful visual distraction, deflecting the anti-religious satire and thus the dangerous implications that a direct attack against the Church would have caused. In the course of the celebration of this atypical feast of Corpus Christi the woman becomes, borrowing Rigolot's expression, a "Christlike figure,"⁹ but in her case a pitiful one.

Although numerous scholars have privileged the comic and the misogynist aspect of Rabelais's writings, the instability of gender is nevertheless also quite manifest in his work and more particularly in the episode that concerns us. If misogynist jokes were a conventional aspect of laughter in his time, it is still very common today although the critic Michael Screech, commenting on this episode in 1979, complained in a nostalgic tone that because of feminists this "source of amusement we may even now be losing."¹⁰ Screech's questionable fear was shared by another scholar, Wayne Booth, a few years later, who objected that "the transport and delighted laughter," the pleasure he had taken during previous readings of this episode, was diminished since feminist criticism had imposed another reading on it.¹¹ His essay prompted not one but two sharp responses from Carla Freccero,¹² one of the few feminists challenging an overwhelmingly masculinist Rabelais criticism. She contests and resists the notion that women reading canonical male authors find themselves silenced by chauvinistic critics.

⁷ Jerome Schwartz, *Irony and Ideology in Rabelais: Structures of Subversion* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 39.

⁸ François Rigolot, "Rabelais, Misogyny, and Christian Charity: Biblical Intertextuality and the Renaissance Crisis of Exemplarity," *PMLA* 10.2 (March 1994): 225–37.

⁹ François Rigolot, "The Three Temptations of Panurge," *Women's Vilification and Christian Humanist Discourse*, 83–104; here 85–93.

¹⁰ Michael A. Screech, *Rabelais* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1979), 53.

¹¹ Wayne Booth, "Freedom of Interpretation: Bakhtin and the Challenge of Feminist Criticism," *Critical Inquiry* 9 (1982): 45–76; here 68.

¹² Carla Freccero, "Damning Haughty Dames: Panurge and the Haulte Dame de Paris (*Pantagruel*, 14)," *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 15 (1985): 57–67; id., "The 'Instance' of the Letter: Woman in the Text of Rabelais," *Rabelais's Incomparable Book: Essays on His Art*, ed. Raymond C. La Charité (Lexington, KY: Lexington French Forum Publishers, 1986), 45–55.

The feminist critic discovers herself to be in the same position as the Haulte Dame is humiliated by Panurge's dirty joke.

In this article, I explore the folkloric dimension absent in Freccero's pertinent essays, elements I believe anchor the text in popular culture and intimately connect it with contemporary humor. The multiple layers of 'substance' superimposed by Rabelais in this episode should cast away the "light laughter" reading that male critics have traditionally imposed on readers. If Rabelais's target is the Corpus Christi, it is nonetheless masked with a misogynist and social satire and anchored in the popular comic.

Panurge's elaborate performance to punish the Lady of Paris for rejecting his sexual advances is strategic on Rabelais's part since it takes place at a key calendar moment of the year, the day of Corpus Christi. Rabelais makes it clear to the reader at the beginning of the chapter with the following words: "Or notez que le lendemain estoit la grande feste du sacre" (456; And yet note that the following day was the great feast of the Holy Sacrament).¹³

This scene is thus framed by Church-time, which was intimately associated with everyone's life. Although fictional, Rabelais's narration is defined by temporal markers, religious and pagan. And as Claude Gaignebet asserts in his impressive study of Rabelais, "time is the key word in the author's oeuvre."¹⁴ His detailed analysis of Rabelais's work proves that with its entire array of symbolic dates and the cyclical succession of feasts marking the calendar at regular intervals (40 days), time really governs Rabelais's characters and their numerous adventures.¹⁵

Corpus Christi is a moveable feast and is celebrated ten days after Pentecost. Its celebration falls between May 21st and June 24th and is thus considered a summer festival, which by the early fourteenth century included a procession heralded by the sound of bells and the sight of flowers strewn along its path.¹⁶ Unlike other processions, this one left the sacred sphere of the church to parade the host in the profane domain of the streets of the city, closely linking the two social domains. This feast was a relatively late addition to the Christian liturgical calendar, and its establishment is historically retraceable to the vision of the beguine Juliena of Mont-Cornillon in early thirteenth-century Belgium. According to Miri Rubin, the nuns, who pinned desire onto the Eucharistic flesh of the crucified Christ,¹⁷ longed

¹³ All translations unless specified will be mine, and I thank Elise Leahy Jr. for her precious help.

¹⁴ Claude Gaignebet, *A Plus hault sens: L'Esotérisme spirituel et charnel de Rabelais*. 2 vols. (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 1986), 457.

¹⁵ Claude Gaignebet and Jean-Dominique Lajoux, *Art profane et religion populaire au Moyen Age* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1985), 62–66.

¹⁶ Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 249.

¹⁷ Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 4.

to honor the Sacrament with a special feast and thus propagated the celebration of the Host. Pope Urban IV, very favorable to this new liturgical feast, promulgated it in Rome, but it was not until 1311 that Pope Clement V imposed it on all Christendom. It is only by the mid-fourteenth century that Corpus Christi became an organic part of the French Missal.¹⁸

The parody that Rabelais offers us in this chapter subverts the celebration of the Host, and places the female body at the center of the religious experience. While the Host represents the elevation, the transubstantiation of the sacred body of Christ, the woman's body on the contrary is subjected to a fall, made impure by the aspersion of dog's urine. The custom of parading the Host in the streets as mentioned earlier, according to Mikhail Bakhtin, was accompanied by representations of the grotesque body in many European countries and more specifically in France and Spain, denoting the expression of a carnivalesque character.¹⁹ The body is indeed the obsessive and recurrent theme in Rabelais's five books and for that matter Bakhtin's work on Rabelais's world remains essential for the history of its relation to the body, to popular tradition, and the carnivalesque. However, Bakhtin's analysis, oblivious to gender, views the feminine as univocal, focusing on the grotesque, fragmented body associated with nature and related to the digestive and reproductive functions.

The woman Panurge humiliates remains unnamed and is only known throughout several episodes as the *Haulte Dame*, which hints mostly at her social position. She is wearing an expensive red satin dress and underneath it a white bodice, mirroring the colors of the vestments that the priest wears on that day.²⁰ In a preserved manuscript of the office of the Feast of the Host found in the city of Liège in Belgium, the prayer of the first vespers reads as following:

... et stolis albis candidis / post transitum maris rubii.²¹

[and wearing white dresses, / after the passage of the Red Sea].

The priest wears red since it evokes the blood spilled by Christ and hence the passion, martyrdom, sacrifice, and divine love.²² The color red was the most coveted color during the Middle Ages in Europe and in the East, and the

¹⁸ Jean Cottiaux, *Sainte Julienne de Cornillon promotrice de la Fête-Dieu* (Liège: Société Royale d'Art et d'Histoire du Diocèse de Liège, 1991), 234.

¹⁹ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 229–30.

²⁰ René Gilles, *Le Symbolisme dans l'art religieux* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1942), 105.

²¹ Cottiaux, *Sainte Julienne de Cornillon*, 246–53; Pope Innocent III started an evolution toward a more homogeneous use of liturgical colors throughout the Western Christendom; see Michel Pastoureau, *Blue: The History of a Color*, trans. Markus I. Cruse (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001), 39.

²² Pastoureau, *Blue*, 37.

abundance of adjectives used to express all the nuances of this color well attest to it. The coveted colors, scarlet red and cramoisy, were a luxury reserved to high dignitaries in the Church and powerful members of lay society.²³ Curiously enough, red was also the color assigned to two ostracized groups in society: the executioners and prostitutes, as Michel Pastoureau affirms.²⁴

In the episode under investigation, the “Haulte dame of Paris” enters the church on the day of Corpus Christi sumptuously dressed, her body prepared for the festive celebration, but the performance of the religious office is rapidly disrupted and subverted by Panurge’s grotesque joke. At that moment we only are aware of her social position, which is revealed by the short description of her dress: the fabric, and the color attesting the expensive price of it:

et pour ce jour ladictte dame s'estoit vestue d'une très belle robe de satin cramoysi et d'une cote de velourx blanc bien précieux (456).²⁵

[and for this day, the afore-mentioned lady, had put on a beautiful red satin dress, and a precious white velvet bodice]

The woman is quickly surrounded by the dogs and loses countenance. The surprise is so overwhelming that she finds herself prohibited from action. Assaulted, she does not voice any anger, and only exhibits a passive resistance even though her rich clothing is drenched in urine. In her widely cited essay, “The Instance of the Letter,” Carla Freccero asserts that the dogs urinate, defecate, and spread semen on the cote of the woman inscribing a message on the blank piece of clothing.²⁶ In fact, they only urinate on her since Rabelais truncated the term “conchoient” [defecate] used in the first edition of *Pantagruel* in 1532, in the revised edition of 1542, which remains the most widely used *one*.²⁷ The analogy of the inscription of a message on the clothing as on a blank sheet of paper is incorrect since the sully occurs on the dress, which is red, and not on the white cote or bodice, which is worn underneath it.

Nonetheless, the clothing of the Lady is at once the locus of the attack, and the focus of attention shifts to her exalted social status. Even humiliated and degraded, her body nevertheless resists, a resistance symbolically highlighted by

²³ Dominique Cardon, *Les “vers” du rouge: Essai d'entomologie historique* (Paris: Diffusions Belin, 1990), 15, 121.

²⁴ Pastoureau, *Blue*, 94.

²⁵ Camille Enlart, *Manuel d'archéologie française, III: Le Costume*, (Paris: A. Picard, 1916), 123. Around 1500 dresses were designed shorter and had a long split to show the bodice underneath.

²⁶ See Freccero, “The Instance of the Letter.”

²⁷ Abel Lefranc ed., *Oeuvres de François Rabelais* (Paris: Editions Champion, 1922). He mentions that in the edition of 1542 Rabelais struck out “conchoient,” term used in the first edition of 1532, leaving only “compissoyent tous ses habillements.”

her white bodice,²⁸ which remains unsullied, protecting her from the dogs' lust. Panurge's misogynist attack is changed into an attack against social status, and Rabelais uses comedy to circumvent the social tension becoming more apparent in the exchanges between the two characters. In fact, Panurge's attack appears to be on both levels; first, encouraged by his previous successes, he has arrogantly assumed he would succeed, and then realizing his failure, he turns it into a performance of humiliation in which the woman loses face and becomes the object of laughter.

First Panurge enjoys the spectacle in a solitary manner, retreating to one of the chapels in the church where he can fully appreciate the spectacle of the unfolding of his prank. Rabelais judiciously calls that corner of the church a "*deduyt*," which curiously in Old French means to be entertained, to rejoice in the performance.²⁹ Then, after the shock of the surprise, as the woman becomes a more general source of laughter in the church, he goes in search of his master Pantagruel, to invite him to come and enjoy the comical representation. When Pantagruel arrives at the scene, he calls the spectacle a "*mystere*,"³⁰ a term that conveys a more appropriate meaning to the performance because of the religious connection between the vulgar joke and the place where it is played out. The "*mystere*" that is "*fort beau et nouveau*," [beautiful and new] is, as Timothy Hampton remarked, a masculine form attributed to the lady who was at first simply "*a plus belle de cette ville*" (the most beautiful of this city).³¹ The Lady's social humiliation and shame is complete, as she becomes a source of laughter to her maids when she is finally able to free herself from the dogs and withdraw to her house.

Freccero argues that if women are, as it is commonly affirmed, absent, silent, or pale figures in Rabelais's work, it is because the homosocial bond between Pantagruel and his servant Panurge, in particular, is so strong. The two share a jealous and exalted friendship that excludes women and in which power and passion are interrelated.³² Françoise Charpentier, by contrast, simply states that Rabelais's texts are centered on a genealogy of men asserting domination and exercising the power that their gender is invested with by the perceptions and

²⁸ Enlart, *Le Costume*, 123.

²⁹ Frédéric Godefroy, *Dictionnaire de l'ancienne langue française et de tous ses dialectes du IX^e au XV^e siècle* (Paris : Draus Reprint, 1965 (1888), 453.

³⁰ A mystery play is a religious play that explains the dogma of Redemption. The religious theater was usually performed outside in front of the church.

³¹ Timothy Hampton, "'Turkish Dogs': Rabelais, Erasmus, and the Rhetoric of Alterity," *Representations* 41 (1993): 58–82; note 32.

³² Carla Freccero, "Feminism, Rabelais, and the Hill/Thomas Hearings: Return to a Scene of Reading," *François Rabelais: Critical Assessments*, ed. Jean-Claude Carron (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 73–82.

structures of society,³³ thus women assume a liminal position in his writings. If women are often excluded from the adventures, it is nevertheless remarkable that we find two of them in chapters twenty-one to twenty-four.

In view of the fact that for Rabelais language is creation, women except old ones are not part of it since they are denied long speeches in his five books. Portraits of women are very often linked to bodily references, and this is particularly true with Panurge who tends to reduce them to an explicit part of their anatomy, their sex. For instance, in chapter fifteen Panurge, who considers Paris as the city of the culture of the promiscuous female,³⁴ suggests to his master Pantagruel the use of female genitalia since they are so abundant as building material to insure better the protection of the city:

“... en les arrangeant par bonne symmetrye d’architecture, et mettant les plus grans au premiers rancz, et puis, en taluant à dos d’asne, arranger les moyens, et finalement les petitiz.” (394)

[‘... by arranging them according to architectural symmetry, and by using the bigger ones for the first rows, and then, by sloping on a donkey’s back, arranging the middle-sized ones, and finally the little ones.’]

This new type of defense, as he envisions it, heralding female genitalia, would not close the city as it is practice in defense tactics, but open it, attracting and repulsing the enemy simultaneously, and thus insuring a cheaper and more effective defense than traditional fortifications. Paradoxically, the fragmented women warriors would be defending the city by exposing themselves to the enemy.³⁵

Rabelais, as it was common at his time, continues denigrating the female gender, but with the Lady, he stresses in several instances during her encounters with Panurge, her lack of religiosity. Chapter twenty-two reveals the manner in which she wears her rosary, wrapping it around her waist, as was indeed fashionable since the thirteenth century, but in such a place it is more an adornment, a jewel enhancing the beauty of her dress rather than a religious object she will use to say her prayers. The holy day seems to be more an opportunity to leave the house, to escape the control of a husband without tarnishing her reputation as an honest woman.

It is indeed within the confines of the church, a sacred but also interestingly enough a place of public meeting that Rabelais offers us as a parody of courtly love, using the clichés of Petrarchan amatory poetry that subverts the social order

³³ Françoise Charpentier, “Un Royaume qui perdure sans femmes,” *Rabelais’s Incomparable Book*, 195–205; here 200.

³⁴ Hope H. Glidden, “Rabelais, Panurge, and the Anti-Courtly Body,” *Etudes Rabelaisiennes* XXV (1991): 35–60; here 38.

³⁵ Françoise Charpentier, “Un Royaume qui perdure sans femmes”; see also Olga V. Trokhimenko’s contribution in this volume.

by dissolving all respect for hierarchy, feminine honor, and marriage. Panurge, the domestic, crudely parodies the scene in which Petrarch saw Laura for the first time in a church and fell in love (6 April 1327, poem 211):

“Ma dame, sachiez que je suis tant amoureux de vous que je n’en peux ny pisser ny fainter” (434)

[My lady, you have to know that I am so in love with you that I cannot piss or defecate]

The practice of meeting lovers or potential ones in church must have been common since in the *Mesnagier de Paris* (ca. 1400), the husband strongly advises his young spouse when going to church not to talk to anybody, woman or man, and to keep her gaze at all times solely on her prayer book.³⁶ The importance of the church not only as a religious, but also a social space is evident in the scatological and carnivalesque celebration that took place during the Feast of Fools celebrated on December 28. The social inversion that took place in the church on that day was a possibility for the population to criticize openly the religious authority, and to take control of the religious space. The disorderly mass celebrated by a fool, elected bishop for the day, was the occasion to use excrements instead of incense.

The church was thus not only a place of prayer, but could also be a noisy, dirty, and crowded space where even animals wandered according to the complaint of Humbert of Romans, Master General of the Dominican order, in thirteenth-century France. He deplores the poor condition of God’s houses of worship where pigs, dogs, and such animals wander around leaving a corresponding mess.³⁷ Panurge is able promptly to attract dogs because they are apparently already present in the church: “. . . tous les chiens qui estoient en l’église accoururent à cette dame” (438; . . . all the dogs who were in the church ran up to the lady).

The hyperbolic number of dogs that will follow the lady—the ‘monstrous’ procession as Bakhtin calls it—is seen by critics as another of Rabelais’s exaggerations, which has a undeniably comic effect. But what signification(s) should one give to the huge amount of dogs forming a procession behind the Lady? While the exaggeration is already a sign of the comic, the precise number of dogs that Rabelais gives us, 600,014, could also be read phonetically as follows: “Ci cens mille³⁸ et quatorze chiens,” which translates into “here I smell a prostitute

³⁶ *Le Mesnagier de Paris* (ed. ca. 1393), ed. Georgina E. Brereton and Janet M. Ferrier (Paris: Lettres Gothiques, 1994), 47–48.

³⁷ Alexander Murray, “Religion among the Poor in Thirteenth-Century France: The Testimony of Humbert de Romans,” *Traditio* 30 (1974): 285–324.

³⁸ Frédéric Godefroy, *Dictionnaire de l’ancienne langue française* (1888; Paris: Draus Reprint, 1965), a mille is a garse, a prostitute.

and fourteen dogs." Thus, when read out loud, a different meaning is brought to light. Indeed Rabelais's work is replete with word play, reflecting on language to demonstrate the gap between words, meanings, and the things they represent. This play with words, very common during the Middle Ages, gives an additional dimension to the text. Rabelais could not have missed the opportunity to make fun of the motto on the blazon of the Dominican order, which reads as follows: *Domini canes* (the Lord's dogs).³⁹ While the Lady of Paris is represented as a parody of a "Christlike figure" as has been mentioned earlier, the presence of numerous dogs could be interpreted as a mock representation of the Dominican friars who were indeed the first ones to be receptive and supportive of the idea of the Feast of the Host.

The overwhelming presence of the dogs in this chapter is symbolically charged since Panurge has recourse to a transference situation supplanting failure with revenge, but his choice of dogs as a medium to transfer his desire casts doubts on the intentionality of his joke. In the initial encounter between Panurge and the Lady, Rabelais's use of erotic and obscene vocabulary signals the direction of the exchanges. On the second meeting, realizing that he will not succeed in his enterprise, Panurge reverses the situation, warning the lady in crude language that he will have her "covered" by the dogs: "je vous feray chevaucher aux chiens" (436). His aggressive urges and false courtly love performance are translated by the bestiality of the hyperbolic number of dogs assaulting the Lady. He fails, however, in his endeavor since the dogs do all the marking and he remains a man of words.

If dogs are fairly common animals in society, these furry creatures nevertheless occupy an ambivalent position. They are despised as impure creatures according to Scripture in which more than forty negative mentions are found and more specifically the one attributing to the dog a dissolute sexual behavior (Det. 23,18); the Bible often applies the comparison with the dog to characterize infamy, dirtiness, and impudence (I Sam. 17, 43; II Sam. 16.9). In the secular world the dog is the hunting companion, the guardian of the flock and of the house agreeing in this with classical authors who valorized the animal in their descriptions, but among clerics, as Jacques Voisenet notes, the dog has more negative qualities than good ones. Superstition and popular beliefs related to dogs abound not only in the Christian world, but also among Jews⁴⁰ and Muslims, and the term 'dog'

³⁹ Charles Cahier, *Caractéristiques des saints*, 2 vols. (Bruxelles: Culture et Civilisation, 1966), 216.

⁴⁰ Lavoslav Glesinger, "Le Chien dans la médecine et dans la superstition médicale juives," *Revue d'histoire de la médecine hébraïque* 9–10 (1956–1957): 235–44; here 241. For example, in the Talmud (Sabb. 67 a) Rabbi Houna recommends an amulet against the tierce fever that contains seven hairs of an old dog. There are not only remedies against rabies, but also against other illnesses, remedies that include in their preparation some part of a dog.

represents for the three religions an insult associated with dishonor.⁴¹ And according to popular belief, the dog, a fateful animal, was also used as an instrument of vengeance, which could explain in part Panurge's choice.

Dogs are seldom represented in art during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance; they are mostly used as secondary and purely figurative representations,⁴² and their revalorization only dates back to the eleventh century when they were introduced in the *Bestiaire* of Pierre of Beauvais where interestingly enough the dog symbolizes the priest who licks the wounds of men, that is, their sins with his tongue.⁴³ In a fourteenth-century manuscript examined by Charles Cahier every sin corresponds to a social situation. For example, to illustrate Envy, the manuscript depicts a monk alongside a dog and a hawk.⁴⁴ Rabelais was thus well aware of the tradition associating dogs and clerics.

In Rabelais's procession of the Holy Sacrament, the priest's aspersion of holy water is replaced in this atypical parody by the dogs that will asperse the lady instilling the entire episode with the scent of urine. The dogs urinate in two distinct instances in this episode: first in the church and later in front of the house of the Lady. In the first instance the dogs cover the lady head to toe with urine ruining her dress. As it has been widely suggested, Panurge's misogynist attack is changed here into an attack against social status because the woman seems to dismiss his advances given the fact that he is a mere domestic. In the second instance, the enormous amount of urine that accumulates at the door of the lady's house creates a river, which has a more positive and utilitarian function according to Rabelais's etymological and folkloric explanation. The huge amount of dog's urine is according to his explanation at the origin of the river Briève in Saint-Marcel, a quarter in Paris where dyers and weavers used the particular properties of its

⁴¹ See Jacques Voisenet, *Bêtes et hommes dans le monde médiéval: Le Bestiaire des clercs du Ve au XIIIe siècle* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), 71–75; Jean-Claude Schmitt, *Le Saint lévrier: Guinefort, guérisseur d'enfants depuis le XIIIe siècle* (Paris: Flammarion, 1979); the cult of St. Guinefort is a good example of a more positive image of the dog. Guinefort, a greyhound, belonged to a knight who left his infant son in the care of the dog during a hunting party. On his return, noticing the dog's bloody jaws, the knight slew it believing he had devoured his son during his absence. But when he found the child alive along with the body of a viper Guinefort had killed, it was too late. To honor the loyal and martyr greyhound, the family erected a shrine. As Jean-Claude Schmitt affirms, since the thirteenth century, women have been invoking Guinefort to cure their sick children.

⁴² Dom Cabrol and H. Leclercq, *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie* (Paris: Letouzey et Ané éditeurs, 1913), 1323–28.

⁴³ Voisenet, *Bêtes et hommes dans le monde médiéval*, 73.

⁴⁴ Victor-Henry Debidour, *Le Bestiaire sculpté du moyen âge en France*. Collection "Grandes études d'art et d'archéologie", 2 (Grenoble: Arthaud, 1961), 249–325.

waters.⁴⁵ The name of the river curiously enough comes from *béber*, which means beaver, an animal very prolific at that period.⁴⁶ Thus urine has as Bakhtin affirms a dual power, debasing and regenerating at the same time.⁴⁷ If the meaning of urine conveyed in the previous examples is fertility and topology, could it also be interchangeable with semen? In view of the fact that Rabelais was a physician, he might be ridiculing the medical practices, folk medicine, and popular practices⁴⁸ of his time by substituting in this episode semen with urine, which could be another plausible explanation for Panurge's transfer of desire. There are many other instances of the use of urine in several chapters throughout Rabelais's *Gargantua* and *Pantagruel*, but, as Yvan Loskoutoff argues, urine in these occasions is associated with death like the Flood.⁴⁹

Panurge's association with dogs also occurs in a previous chapter, but in that instance he was the one followed by dogs, as he was trying to escape the Turks. They are metaphorically called "traitorous dogs," a disparaging expression for the infidels. These metaphorical dogs will be turned into real ferocious dogs pursuing him.⁵⁰ In the episode with the Lady of Paris, Panurge is the instigator, so the opposite is taking place: the real dogs' urine is turned into matter of folklore, being at the origin of a river in France.

Panurge in this chapter embodies desire in all its registers; from the obscene to the aggressive and displays an evident disdain for the opposite sex. Yet beyond their reproductive capacities, women's insatiable sexual appetite is frightening

⁴⁵ See Jacques Le Goff, *Pour un autre Moyen Age: Temps, travail et culture en occident* (Paris: Gallimard, 1977). The same river, the Bièvre appears in the legend of Saint-Marcel defeating the dragon and forcing him to disappear into the river, which waters have very heavy connotations. The dog's urine contains ammonia, and thus was used by dyers before applying the dye.

⁴⁶ Albert Dauzat, Gaston Deslandes, and Charles Rostaing, *Dictionnaire étymologique des noms de rivières et de montagnes en France* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1978), 28. Interestingly enough, the particularity of the beaver according to the bestiaries is that when this rodent feels threatened by hunters, he saves his life by tearing off his testicles and throwing them (which also have a medicinal value).

⁴⁷ Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 150–51.

⁴⁸ John G. Bourke, *Scatological Rites of All Nations* (Washington, DC: W. H. Lowdermilk & Co., 1891); see also Francesca Canadé Sautman, *La Religion du quotidien: Rites et croyances populaires de la fin du Moyen Age* (Florence: Leo S. Olshcki Editore, 1995); Guillaume Bouchet, *Les Séries* (Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1969), 87–96; Septième serée (on dogs).

⁴⁹ Yvan Loskoutoff, "Un Etron dans la cornucopie: la valeur évangélique de la scatologie dans l'oeuvre de Rabelais et de Marguerite de Navarre," *Revue d'Histoire Littéraire de la France* 95 (1995): 906–32; here 918; inundation with urine plays an important role in chapter XVII in *Gargantua* who urinates on the Parisians assembled around him. His mare drowns Picrocholé's soldiers at Vède's ford, and the episode where Gargantua's torrent of urine stops the pilgrims on their path, and in chapter XXVIII in *Pantagruel*, where Anarche's camp is inundated by Pantagruel's urine.

⁵⁰ See Hampton, "Turkish Dogs."

and, furthermore, threatening to male potency, calling into question male sexuality. Therefore, Panurge's sexual ardor remains essentially verbal:

Par Dieu! (dist il) si veulx bien moy de vous, mais c'est chose qui ne vous coustera rien et n'en aurez rien moins. Tenez (monstrant sa longue braguette): voicy Maistre Jan Chouart qui demande logis" (436).

[By God! (he said), I do want you, but it will be something that will not cost you anything and you will have nothing less as a result. Here (showing his long codpiece): here is Master Chouart who is asking to come in]

This sexual anxiety is translated into the attention Panurge gives to his sex. This body part is individualized, personified, having a life of its own. Panurge calls his sex "Maistre Jean Chouart" (male sex in slang), but also curiously "Maistre Jean Jeudy" (man of little worth, cuckold husband).⁵¹ Panurge's vulnerability is masked by the power of his tongue, another powerful member with an apparent will of its own. In fact his sexual boastings seem mostly verbal; he is more astute with his tongue, a characteristic more often attributed to women. Lingual and sexual performance, according to Carla Mazzio, one's ability to speak effectively and "be more serviceable to the Ladies," are here intimately and physiologically entwined.⁵²

Throughout the adventures and travels of Pantagruel and Panurge, sexuality, gender, and identity continuously intersect. As Lawrence Kritzman affirms, Rabelais's text depicts sexual difference as emanating from the difference of desires, creating fictions of sexuality that investigate the very questions of male gender identity, a notion that appears no longer to be stable.⁵³ This instability of gender is reflected in the change in men's clothing that occurred by the second half of the fourteenth century, with the emphasis placed on a more fitted attire. The codpiece that the giant Gargantua in the second book, and Panurge in *Pantagruel*, display, the "magnifique braguette," occupies a central position attracting the gaze with its embroideries and with its oversize dimension.

⁵¹ Edmond Huguet, *Dictionnaire de la langue française du seizième siècle* (Paris: Champion, 1932).

⁵² Carla Mazzio, "Sins of the Tongue," *The Body in Parts: Fantasies of Corporeality in Early Modern Europe*, eds. David Hillman and Carla Mazzio (New York and London: Routledge, 1997): 53–81; here 59–60.

⁵³ Lawrence D. Kritzman, *The Rhetoric of Sexuality and the Literature of the French Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

The codpiece⁵⁴ emphasizing a gender-specific silhouette is deliberately conceived as the exterior form of the enhancement of a man's virility as noted by Jeffrey Persels.⁵⁵ The construction of male gender identity emerges in the text as the result of Panurge's misogynist discourse, which represents the negative qualities attributed to women and the necessity to domesticate female desire. Yet such a hypermasculinity signals an overcompensation because if masculinity is defined according to the size of the genitalia or its enhancement with an oversized codpiece, it promotes in fact a lack, an absence, and ultimately the potential sexual impotence of Panurge. By the third book, the *Tiers Livre*, he has abandoned his codpiece, and appears as a more ambiguous character, doubting everything.

Panurge is in fact the one who assaults the woman, and does so by sacrificing a female dog, and through the substances he obtains from her body, attracts hundreds of thousands of dogs. If we see the dog as an emblem of the days of Sirius or canicula, (the dog days), Panurge's misogynist gesture takes on a new additional meaning. The insult to the Lady, the role of the dogs, and Panurge's function all are linked to a ritual in which sexual assault is sublimated through a trick. Although women were supposed to be aggressive and dangerous during that period (the dog days), an inversion of sexuality takes place.⁵⁶ Even though the trick denounces in women a sexuality that is irrepressible and hidden, it only masks Panurge's impotence, and Rabelais seems to mock and deconstruct masculinity through the high number of dogs. Finally, the use of dog's ashes, the urine sullyng the clothing of the lady, the alchemical meaning of these elements, are all encoded in the deep layers of the text. This last meaning of the episode has to be read in relation to the Renaissance interest in alchemy, the mysterious, and the symbolic.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Jules Quicherat, *Histoire du costume en France depuis les temps reculés jusqu'à la fin du XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Hachette et Cie, 1877), 353. At the beginning of the sixteenth century, bodies are still gendered to reflect social status and sexual identity, but it was also a period of sartorial excess. Social status was read through clothing and although the number of sumptuary laws doubled during that first part of the century in France in order to limit and circumscribe luxury fabrics and jewels to the members of the nobility, the reign of Francis I was nevertheless very propitious to overindulge in toiletry. But by the time of the reign of Henri III, the fashion of the codpiece had disappeared. Chapters VIII and IX in *Gargantua* contain clothing descriptions that reveals just how intricate male fashion had become among the upper class under Francis I.

⁵⁵ For detailed information about the masculine trend of the oversize codpiece, see Jeffrey C. Persels, "Bragueta Humanistica or Humanism's Codpiece," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 28.1 (1997): 79–99.

⁵⁶ Gaignebet, *Art Profane*, 71.

⁵⁷ Barbara C. Bowen. *The Age of Bluff, Paradox & Ambiguity in Rabelais & Montaigne* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1972).

Conclusion

In this episode like in many others, Rabelais exposes a crisis in masculinity, blurring the markers of an identity determined in terms of the established gender order of the Renaissance. He combines it with a critique and a parody of Corpus Christi in a highly visual performance in which elements of folklore— dogs, urine, the grotesque use of the body—become an important part of the comic. As Bourdieu argues, if masculine dominance and violence seek, through visible signs of masculinity, to protect the male body from the type of vulnerability it projects onto women, the masculine is destabilized through performativity and parody.⁵⁸ Panurge's humiliating joke resolves his vexation in a very prevalent systematic vilification of the woman, but the comical effects, the satire, and the scatological reveal in fact an inverse movement toward absence. It is the defeat of Panurge's conquering sexuality; thus the light laughter is but a mere rictus.

⁵⁸ Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, 50–51

Chapter 21

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Laughing Out Loud in the *Heptaméron*: A Reassessment of Marguerite de Navarre's Ambivalent Humor

In story 54 of Marguerite de Navarre's *Heptaméron*, a matron glimpses the shadow of her husband on the wall of their bedroom, where he is kissing a serving girl. Rather than yelling, smashing her candle in the servant's nose, as one storyteller suggests ("Par ma foy, dist Ennasuite . . . je me fusse levée et luy eusse tué la chandelle sur le nez," 343), taking a lover herself, or setting fire to the nearest combustible like the spurned wife in Nouvelle 37, the woman opts for a different strategy: she laughs out loud ("elle se print tout hault à rire," 343).¹ The guffaw is so extraordinarily vigorous that the entwined shadows immediately separate in alarm ("les ombres eurent paour de son ris, et se separerent," 343), as the matron intended; and the startled gentleman, who was "seur que sa femme ne les pouvoit veoir" ("quite sure his wife could not see them," 445), given the layout of the room, asks her to explain her outburst. "Mon amy, je suis si sotté," she replies, "que je rys à mon ombre" ("My dear," she replied, "I'm such a silly thing that I laugh at my own shadow!" 446). These mendacious words and the theatrical

¹ All quotations of Marguerite de Navarre in the original French are taken from *L'Heptaméron*, ed. Michel François (Paris: Garnier Classiques, 1964). Unless otherwise noted, the English translations used here are from *The Heptaméron*, trans. Paul A. Chilton (Harmondsworth and New York: Penguin, 1984). See also *The Heptaméron of Margaret, Queen of Navarre*, trans. Walter Kelly (London: Published for the Trade, n.d.), in *A Celebration of Women Writers* at: <http://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/navarre/heptameron/heptameron.html> (last accessed on January 30, 2010).

cackle that preceded them not only cause the husband to abandon his adulterous lovemaking, but also pique his interest. "Le gentil homme luy demanda pourquoy elle ryoit si fort," Marguerite tells us ("the gentleman asked her what she was laughing about," 446); but "jamais, quelque enqueste qu'il en peut faire [sa femme] ne luy en confessa autre chose" (343; "[but] question her as he might, the husband could not persuade her to say any more," 446). At once provocative and enigmatic, the incongruous guffaw and its puzzling motto or caption elicit similar questions from readers today. Unlike the matron's husband, we know she has witnessed his infidelity; but this knowledge alone does not explain her behavior or her words. Why does she laugh out loud at his betrayal? And how does her cryptic explanation, which confuses us more than it enlightens, supplement her laughter and contribute to the text's message or meaning? Before returning to Novella 54 to address these issues, let us look briefly at the *Heptaméron* as a whole for insights into Marguerite's eccentric humor.

Written in the 1540s and published posthumously in 1558 and 1559,² the queen of Navarre's *magnum opus* is composed of 72 stories and frame discussions that focus repeatedly on rape, murder, and adultery.³ For this reason, and because of the devastating flood that figures as a backdrop and pre-text for the short stories, few would classify the volume as a comic masterwork.⁴ While Marguerite describes her compilation as a "French *Decameron*,"⁵ a superficial reading shows

² An incomplete edition consisting of 67 randomly ordered *nouvelles*, edited by Pierre Boaistuau, dit Launay, was published anonymously under the title *Histoires des Amans fortunez* in 1558 (Paris: G. Gilles). This was followed in 1559 by the more complete *L'Heptaméron des Nouvelles de très illustre et très excellente Princesse Marguerite de Valois, Royné de Navarre* (Paris: J. Cavellier), edited by Claude Gruget. While stories 11, 44, and 46 in this second volume differ from their counterparts in later editions of the *Heptaméron*, including that of Michel François, the *nouvelles* are divided into days and follow the organizational scheme used in modern editions.

³ In fact, Pierre Jourda credits Marguerite with moving the *nouvelle* or *conte* in a far more serious direction than her predecessors: "Si elle ne dédaigne pas les formes traditionnelles du conte, et du comique populaire, elle s'intéresse surtout aux sujets qui flattent son goût du romanesque, ses curiosités psychologiques. Avec elle, le conte prend un air sérieux, parfois tragique qu'il n'avait encore eu que très rarement. Le sang coule plus d'une fois dans ses pages vivantes." "Préface," *Conteurs français du XVI siècle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1956), xxxviii. Because they see Marguerite's gravitas as an innovation, which helps distinguish her from other conteurs, many scholars have focused primarily on this serious side of the *Heptaméron*. Bakhtin, however, contends that humor and seriousness are in fact complementary rather than conflicting: "True ambivalent and universal humor does not deny seriousness but purifies and completes it" (Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky [Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1993], 122–23).

⁴ For more on the function of storms, floods, and other weather-related phenomena in literature, see Albrecht Classen, "Cataclysmic Yet Transformative Consequences of Bad Weather in Medieval Literature: From *Apollonius of Tyre* to Marguerite de Navarre's *Heptaméron*," *arcadia* (forthcoming).

⁵ "Je croy qu'il n'y a nulle de vous qui n'ait leu les cent Nouvelles de Bocace . . . Et, à l'heure, j'oy les deux dames dessus nommées, avecq plusieurs autres de la court, qui se delibererent d'en faire autant," prol., 9, ["I don't think there's one of us who hasn't read the hundred tales by Boccaccio

little in her work to match the earthy humor and comic verve of either her predecessor Boccaccio, whose “mercantile epic” holds more than 150 references to laughter, or her contemporary Rabelais, who contended that “rire est le propre de l’homme.”⁶ All three authors punctuate their writings with sexual and bathroom humor, puns, anticlerical satire, and the antics of tricksters,⁷ but in Marguerite this levity is often overshadowed by the recurring pathos of her narratives. Who can laugh, after all, at the queen’s portrayal of a new mother, raped by a Franciscan, whose flailing limbs pommel her infant to death as she hangs herself (N. 23)? Or at the anguished young widow, betrayed by the man she loves, who mutilates her own face to discourage his aggression (N. 10)?

Informed by a combination of literary sources and fact, many of these “true stories” paint a grim picture of Marguerite’s world, which at times offered little fodder for laughter. Notwithstanding the optimism of humanistic rhetoric, and the lavish expenditures of the French Crown, hers was in general an era of high mortality and widespread disease, of religious persecution and almost constant warfare.⁸ While Marguerite’s rank and wealth may have cushioned her from the abject living conditions of the poor, they did little to exempt her from the cruelty and betrayal of those around her, from the quarrels and petty intrigues of life at court, or from the dangers and sorrows that faced women in particular, ranging from high-risk childbirth to sexual assault. That Marguerite herself was raped as a young woman, perhaps by Admiral Bonnivet, seems probable: Brantôme alludes to the attack in his memoirs, and sexual assaults figure almost obsessively in her narratives.⁹ Her rank also did little to protect her from a loveless, arranged

... As a matter of fact, the two ladies I’ve mentioned, along with other people at the court, made up their minds to do the same as Boccaccio,” 68]

⁶ “Aux lecteurs,” *Gargantua*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 1 (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1962), 3: “Mieulx est de ris que de larmes escrire, / Pour ce que rire est le propre de l’homme” (“Mirth’s my theme and tears are not, / For laughter is man’s proper lot,” *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, trans. J.M. Cohen [Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1955], 36). On the one hand, Rabelais is echoing Aristotle’s contention in *De partibus animalium* (*On the Parts of Animals*) that “no animal but man ever laughs” (3.10). See *The Works of Aristotle*, Vol. 2, in *Great Books of the Western World* (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1996). Like a number of his contemporaries, however, Rabelais expands upon Aristotle’s original meaning, portraying laughter not only as an exclusive trait of our species, but, more importantly, as an *essential* human faculty that “makes the world a better and saner place” (Barbara Bowen, *Enter Rabelais, Laughing* [Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 1998], xiii; also, Ch. 1, 1–28).

⁷ This anticlerical strand of humor and laughter also finds many parallels in sixteenth-century German *Schwänke*; see the contribution to this volume by Albrecht Classen, with further references.

⁸ In his *La coscienza della rinascita negli umanisti* (Rome: Storia e Letteratura, 1949), Franco Simone called this “other side” of humanistic progress and enlightenment “l’envers du siècle.” See also Hiram Haydn, *The Counter-Renaissance* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1950).

⁹ See Patricia Cholakian, *Rape and Writing in the Heptaméron of Marguerite de Navarre* (Carbondale

marriage to Charles d'Alençon, a doltish man of inferior intellect; or from the philandering of her second husband, Henry of Navarre, who was likely the model for the charming rake Hircan in the *Heptaméron*; or from the death of their infant son Jean in 1530, near the end of Marguerite's childbearing years.

Shortly thereafter her *Miroir de l'âme pécheresse* (*Mirror of the Sinful Soul*, 1531), a volume of devotional poetry motivated in part by her grief, was condemned by Sorbonne theologians, either for its evangelical overtones, or because of the author's known friendship with high-profile Reformers. Religious tensions in France would moreover escalate over the next two decades, culminating in the hanging and burning of suspected heretics in the 1540s; and while Marguerite welcomed dissidents at her court in Navarre, offsetting in some small measure the tide of violence against Reformers, her relationship with her beloved brother Francis I was increasingly strained. Despite their religious and political differences, however, Marguerite's affection for and loyalty toward the king of France were steadfast, as evidenced by her extreme grief over his death in 1547 during the composition of her *Heptaméron*.

Much like Boccaccio, Marguerite de Navarre pens her "romans jovials," or amusing stories, amid sorrow and turmoil; yet most readers would agree that her tales bear the mark of this pathos more than his. Until recently, with the publication of Dora Polachek's *Heroic Virtue, Comic Infidelity* (1993),¹⁰ and the appearance of John Parkin's *The Humor of Marguerite de Navarre in the Heptaméron* (2008),¹¹ scholars have acknowledged but accorded little real importance to the lighter side of Marguerite's prose, focusing more intently on either its scabrous qualities, or on its religious and moral implications. Notably Bakhtin, who likens Boccaccio to Rabelais for his carnivalesque humor, relegates Marguerite to the ranks of "relatively progressive," but sober-minded, humanists of the "aristocratic and bourgeois Renaissance."¹² And while Pierre Jourda concedes that the queen hopes to "amuse" us, he dismisses humor as "le moindre de ses soucis" ("the least of her concerns").¹³

and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991), 2–31; and Patricia and Rouben Cholakian, *Marguerite de Navarre: Mother of the Renaissance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 2–3.

¹⁰ Dora E. Polachek, *Heroic Virtue, Comic Infidelity: Reassessing Marguerite de Navarre's Heptaméron* (Amherst, MA: Hestia Press, 1993).

¹¹ John Parkin, *The Humor of Marguerite de Navarre in the Heptaméron: A Feminist Author Before Her Time* (Lewiston, Queenston, Ontario, and Lampeter, Wales: Edwin Mellen Press, 2008).

¹² Bakhtin, 138. See also Nicole Cazuran, who acknowledges Marguerite's humor but subordinates it to her moralizing tendencies: "L'Art de faire rire ou sourire s'accommode ainsi d'un style en demi-teinte, où l'ironie se substitue à la verve pittoresque et il ne saurait s'abstraire, pour l'essentiel, du regard du moraliste" ("Comédie," *L'Heptaméron de Marguerite de Navarre* [Paris: SEDES, 1977], 109–26).

¹³ *Marguerite d'Angoulême, duchesse d'Alençon, reine de Navarre (1492–1549): Étude biographique et*

On one level, the queen of Navarre encourages this serious reading of her prose. Even her most light-hearted stories end with moralizing conclusions and provide a forum for ethical, theological, and epistemological debate, inviting comparisons between her *nouvelles* and the later *Histoires tragiques*, as well as traditional exempla.¹⁴ For scholars familiar with her devotional writings, which extol the virtues of divine “joie” over the frivolity of earthly laughter, suspending our deeply engrained belief in the queen’s sobriety and all-consuming spirituality is admittedly a difficult task, even in novellas that are patently funny, or where the storytellers’ chortles provide cues for us to laugh. Yet for readers who approach the *Heptaméron* with an open mind, and who are attentive to Marguerite’s cues, it is clear that mirth abounds in her *magnum opus*, which offers a veritable compendium of Renaissance humor far richer than Laurent Joubert’s *Traité du ris* (1579).¹⁵ As Daniel Ménager points out in his *La Renaissance et le rire*, laughter as it is manifested in sixteenth-century texts results not from a single stimulus such as happiness or surprise, but rather from multiple and complex emotions.¹⁶ According to Ménager, humor also increases in complexity (“gagne en complexité,” 36) during the Renaissance, which, in its medical and philosophical treatises, eventually recognizes as many different laughs as there are laughers in the world.¹⁷ While this assessment is clearly applicable to Rabelais’s macaronic mock epic, it also sheds light on Marguerite de Navarre’s complex prose.

Alternately private and communal, sadistic and embarrassed, ribald and childlike, wise and foolish, laughter in the *Heptaméron* appears in ambivalent contexts; and it is as varied and multifaceted as Marguerite’s characters themselves, who laugh at stimuli as diverse as dung-soiled garments, romantically inclined friars, and the infidelity of their own spouses. These unexpected glimmers of merriment provide the queen’s characters and readers alike a cathartic respite

littéraire (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1930), vol. 2, 887: “Amuser, sans doute, elle y pense,—mais c’est le moindre de ses soucis.” See also François Paré, “Pour l’amour du frère: l’inceste fraternel dans l’*Heptaméron*,” Polachek, *Heroic Virtue*, 104: “[Le] comique . . . me semble largement absent de l’œuvre de Marguerite de Navarre.”

¹⁴ See, for example, Pollie Bromilow, *Models of Women in Sixteenth-Century French Literature: Female Exemplarity in the Histoires tragiques (1559) and the Heptaméron (1559)* (Lewiston, NY, Queenston, Ontario, and Lampeter, Wales: Edwin Mellen Press, 2007).

¹⁵ (Paris, 1579; rpt. Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1973). See also Gregory de Rocher, *Rabelais’s Laughters and Joubert’s Traité du ris* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1979). In her “Rire et Angoisse dans l’*Heptaméron*,” *Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature* 41 (1987): 51–64, Colette H. Winn uses Joubert’s categories to analyze Marguerite’s humor, arguing that laughter in the *Heptaméron* hinges upon the same “faits accidentels” (i.e., unintended gaffes such as literal and figurative falls, nudity, errors, and credulity), intentional “faits ridicules” (e.g., deceit and trickery), and ambivalence that the French physician outlines in his *Traité*.

¹⁶ *La Renaissance et le rire* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1995), 6.

¹⁷ Ménager, *La Renaissance et le rire*, 44.

from the pathos of her fiction and of life itself, reversing the masks of tragedy and comedy in Rabelaisian fashion, and suggesting alternative responses to the human condition that privilege laughter over violence and despair, and humor as both a problem-solving strategy and a means of coping with adversity.¹⁸

For all its strangeness, the matron's outburst in nouvelle 54 is by no means the only instance of odd laughter in the *Heptaméron*; and it is merely one example of Marguerite's polyvalent use of humor. As we have seen, levity often provides a respite from pathos and figures as a response to transgression in the *Heptaméron*. Already in 1555, Jeanne d'Albret pointedly calls her mother's narratives "romans jovials," not entirely in a complimentary context.¹⁹ Moreover, the prologue itself, which introduces ten travelers stranded in an abbey during a flood, juxtaposes tears and laughter from the outset. Despite the death of one pilgrim's husband, and the loss of countless servants during their journey, the survivors chortle and joke together following their rescue, within the safety of the cloister. In the very same breath, Ennasuite laughs and speaks of death, alluding to the murder of Longarine's husband, the drowning of Simontault's servants, and the gruesome butchery of her own retainers by a bear:

Ennasuite, tout en riant, lui respondit: "Chascune n'a pas perdu son mary comme vous, et pour perte des serviteurs ne se fault desesperer, car l'on en recouvre assez. Toutes foyz, je suys bien d'opinion que nous aions quelque plaisant exercice pour passer le temps; autrement, nous serions mortes le lendemain (prol., 7).

[“Ennasuite laughed and rejoined, ‘Not everyone’s lost a husband, like you, you know. And as for losing servants, no need to despair about that – there are plenty of men ready to do service! All the same, I do agree that we ought to have something to amuse us, so that we can pass the time as pleasantly as we can’” (Prologue, 66).]

When Hircan proposes sex as the most agreeable pastime ("le pasetemps que je vouldrois choisir," 8) for the stranded travelers, moreover, Parlamente *half-laughingly* ("demy en riant"; italics mine) points out that lovemaking is "ung

¹⁸ For surprising parallels to some seventeenth-century theater plays in France, especially *La Devineresse, ou les Faux Enchantements* (The Fortune-Teller, or the False Enchantments), by Thomas Corneille and Jean Donneau de Visé, see the contribution to this volume by Diane Rudell.

¹⁹ In her correspondence, Jeanne d'Albret suggests that Francis I, fatigued with Marguerite's penchant for offending theologians with her writings, instructed his sister to abandon controversial questions of dogma, and to turn her energies instead to frivolous "romans jovials," with no serious content. Given the *Heptaméron*'s evangelical overtones, and its hard-hitting political satire, clearly Marguerite did not entirely accede to her daughter's request, camouflaging her commentaries instead with humor. Whether Jeanne d'Albret fails to see this, or simply downplays the *Heptaméron*'s political and theological implications, either to avoid reprisals or to showcase her own religious convictions, is unclear. See Cholakian, *Rape and Writing*, 140. For a transcript of this letter and a discussion of its authenticity, see David M. Bryson, "The Vallant Letters of Jeanne d'Albret: Fact or Forgery?" *French History* 13 (1999): 161–86.

passetemps particulier" for partners, while storytelling is a group activity "où chascun prendra plaisir" (9; "which everybody can join in," 68). From their inception, then, the tales are born of laughter as well as tragedy.

When their content and tonality become too dark, Marguerite periodically swings the pendulum back toward laughter. Following the tragic chronicle of Floride and Amadour (N. 10), for example, Parlamente urges the next storyteller to counterbalance the tears with mirth: "Ne nous faictes point recommencer nostre Journée par larmes" (87; "Please don't make us cry right at the beginning of our second day!" 155), she tells Nomerfide, who obligingly regales the group with a light-hearted scatological tale designed to lift their spirits and produce laughter. Upon soiling her skirts with dung in a monastery privy, the female protagonist in Novella 11 calls out for help, insisting that she is dishonored; and while serious overtones lurk in the background, in the maid's all-too-plausible assumption that a monk is raping her mistress, and in the anticlerical symbolism of the monastery's filth and waste, Marguerite uses the servant's misunderstanding of her lady's cryptic words as a fulcrum for humor rather than pathos. In response to the maid's cries, nearby gentlemen storm the privy to rescue the hapless woman from her attackers, only to find her alone in the outhouse with her skirts up—and covered with excrement.

While the woman is mortified, her rescuers cannot contain their laughter ("qui ne fut pas sans rire de leur cousté," 89) at the exposure of her lower bodily strata, and at the gap between the high tragedy they expected and the gross physical comedy they discover. Most remarkably, the besmirched lady herself soon follows suit, forgetting "her anger, and laugh[ing] with the rest" (157; "changea sa collerle à rire comme les autres," 89) in a gesture of communal bonding, as she recognizes the humor of her predicament and manages to laugh with her rescuers at both herself, the monks' filth, and the absurdity of her predicament.²⁰ For her, the hilarity is both curative and transformative, largely because of its scatological dimensions; and this holds true for the *devisants* as well. As Nomerfide predicted, they laugh heartily ("la compaignie se print bien fort à rire," 89) at the bathroom humor, forgetting the previous day's pathos in their mirth over the woman's embarrassment. From her evocative description of the dirty outhouse, to her memorable sketch of the matron's dung-soiled skirts and bare bottom, Marguerite informs this brief account of monacal malfeasance and feminine humiliation with

²⁰ As Albrecht Classen mentions in his Introduction to this volume, a very similar type of laughter, both communal and regenerative in nature, erupts in Story 27 of the *Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles* (in *Conteurs français du XVI^e siècle*, 117–23), where a cuckolded husband who has been locked in a chest overnight manages to overcome his shame and to laugh with his "rescuers" the next morning.

a rich array of comic stimuli, at once flirting with and transforming the tragedy that colors so much of her anticlerical satire.

On the surface, of course, Novella 54 differs markedly from this and other humorous stories in the *Heptaméron*. First, it is the only instance where the *noise* or acoustic value of laughter figures as a problem-solving strategy in the short-story collection: much like a loud cough or slammed door, the wife's laugh reminds her husband and the serving girl that she is present in the room, distracts them from their love making, and directs their attention to her own aberrant behavior instead. Second, the wife's guffaw, which Marguerite declines to explain discursively, apparently has little to do with actual mirth or amusement, or indeed, with any of the other emotional or cognitive response mechanisms—or stimuli—that we typically associate with laughter. Up to a point, the outburst's function and effect are consistent with humor theory. Freud, for example, would likely label the wife's laughter therapeutic; Bergson, condemnatory; and Bakhtin, regenerative.²¹ While Marguerite provides no details, we may surmise that laughing out loud both alleviates the woman's stress and contributes to the "healing" of her marriage on a psychological level; and in Bergsonian terms, the guffaw also serves as a vehicle of corrective punishment for the husband's transgressive behavior. While Bakhtin's view of humor is rooted in class disparities rather than gender relations, his approach to the carnivalesque allows us to view the matron's outburst as a means of upending the husband's dominant perspective, and of scrutinizing patriarchal peccadilloes through the restorative lens of laughter. As John Parkin points out, the incongruity of this reversal of the dominant paradigm, or the queen's willingness to scrutinize male hegemony, is itself a major source of humor in the *Heptaméron*.²²

Far from being spontaneous or involuntary, moreover, like most examples of hilarity that are present in the *Heptaméron*, or analyzed by humor theorists, the matron's laughter is clearly voluntary or staged: it is fake merriment, stimulated not by reality but rather by a revealing facsimile or type of shadow art, which is itself theatrical or even cinematic *avant la lettre*. In this sense, the woman's laugh

²¹ See Sigmund Freud, *Wit and Its Relation to the Unconscious*, trans. A. A. Brill (London: Routledge, 1999); Henri Bergson, "Laughter: An Essay on the Comic," trans. Cloudesley Brereton and Fred Rothwell, from the online version at the Gutenberg Project: <http://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/webbin/gutbook/lookup?num=4352> (last accessed on January 30, 2010); and Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 1–58. Clearly, laughter is regenerative for the Russian Formalist in part because it has a descending, destructive component as well, which reverses normative "truths" and perspectives: "[Laughter] is a peculiar point of view relative to the world," he tells us; through it, "the world is seen anew" (66).

²² For Parkin, *The Humor of Marguerite de Navarre*, the matron's guffaw moreover represents not just value-based satire, which upholds normative morality by criticizing the husband's transgression of its protocols, but also "clan-based humor," which occurs when one group (in this instance, women) mocks and satirizes another (men).

is disingenuous, proactive rather than simply reactive, and calculated to elicit the response that she achieves—which is, as Marguerite puts it, to make her husband stop “kissing the shadowy face on the wall” (446). Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the matron’s paradoxical guffaw draws our attention to the ambiguities, and indeed, polyvalence, of laughter throughout the *Heptaméron*, where the lexical signifier *rire*, the physiological act of laughing, and the humor that normally subtends them are not necessarily coterminous. The gap between thought and act, word and thing, and the interface between physiological and written laughter in the *Heptaméron* find a modern-day corollary in internet slang that provides a useful context for looking at literary and real-life humor in Marguerite de Navarre’s prose.

The acronym “LOL” figures prominently in modern text messaging, most often as an abbreviation for “laughing out loud.” To those of us more accustomed to deciphering manuscripts or early modern printed materials than cyberspace jargon, the letters can be confusing. All-acronyms.com lists 85 different “meanings” for the abbreviation, and this near-exhaustive inventory fails to include the now archaic “lots of love,” which some of us erroneously associate with LOL.²³ If a statement, idea, or narrative is funny, after all, why does one need to add a virtual laugh track—a reminder that one is, or should be, “laughing out loud”? By inserting a gloss directing readers to laugh, or figuring his or her own laughter within the margins, the author ostensibly strives to reinforce, or reveal, the text’s inherent humor; but the very need for such a supplement also signals the message’s ambiguity, by suggesting that the words or situation may not be funny in and of themselves, and urging us to reevaluate them in comic terms.

To some degree, this is precisely what Marguerite does in the *Heptaméron*. Not only does she portray characters laughing in patently unfunny contexts, as the matron does in Novella 54, but she also directs our attention to moments when the *devisants* or storytellers are chuckling, providing templates for our own reactions to their stories that are alternatively normative and abnormal. In this way, and by showcasing the precise moment when anger and sorrow turn on their axis and give way to mirth, she depicts laughter and tears as opposite faces of the same coin, different and yet paradoxically reversible. In effect, she has inserted an off-beat laugh track into her “tragic stories,” prompting us to reevaluate them from all angles. The result is not only thought provoking, but it helps us to see that humor and pathos work together in tandem in the *Heptaméron*: in addition to providing a respite from tragedy and suffering, Marguerite’s unpredictable laughter keeps readers off balance, at once communicating and camouflaging her

²³ The website does include “Loads of Love,” however. See “LOL,” *All-acronyms.com*, at: <http://www.all-acronyms.com/LOL> (last accessed on Jan. 30, 2010).

evangelism, her sociopolitical satire, and her condemnation of hypocrisy and vice among the rich and powerful.

As one might expect in a writer known for her piety, Marguerite includes echoes within her text of the negativity toward levity common in medieval theological writings. According to the Cappodocian father Basil, in his *On the Perfection of the Life of Solitaries* (Epistle 22), "The Christian ought not to laugh nor even to suffer laugh-makers."²⁴ Not surprisingly, giggles and guffaws among Marguerite's storytellers and characters are at times transgressive, misinterpreted, and repressed, in keeping with this backdrop of religious sobriety. For example Admiral Bonnivet, disguised as a woman's lover, rolls over in bed and laughs triumphantly at his success in bedding and beguiling her; more seriously, an aristocratic widow with a proclivity for laughter ("qui ryoit volontiers," 28; who laughed willingly or "liked to enjoy herself," 90) is attacked by a male friend, who mistakes her cheerful disposition for a sexual invitation; and the virtuous *dame* in Novella 13, who becomes titillated in church while waiting to present her deceased admirer's widow to the Regent, retires quickly into a side chapel ("Se retira en une chappelle où elle passa l'envye qu'elle avoit de rire," 108) to avoid laughing out loud at the other woman's gullibility.

In the last of these examples, the virtuous lady's repressed and involuntary laughter, which is the mirror opposite of the staged guffaw in nouvelle 54, is triggered by the immense gap between the widow's "rose-colored" image of her husband and his real-world foibles. Showing off "l'anneau qu'elle avoit au doigt comme le signe de sa parfaicte amitié" (107; "the ring that she wore on her finger as a sign of the perfect love that her husband had borne her," 178), the credulous widow praises the devotion of her husband, a captain in the Holy Land, in fulsome terms. What she fails to realize, however, is that the ring was originally a gift from her errant spouse to the virtuous lady, who forwards "her" jewel to the man's wife with an elaborate white lie. "Monsieur vostre mary . . . m'a decelé . . . le regret de ne vous avoir tant aymée comme il devoit" (104; "[Your husband] told me of his sorrow that he had not loved you as much as he ought to have done," 175), the virtuous lady writes untruthfully, signing the name of a nun to her missive to camouflage her own identity and make the message more believable. "Me pria et conjura, à son partement, de vous envoyer ceste lettre avec ce diamant, lequel je vous prie garder pour l'amour de luy, vous asseurant que, si Dieu le fait retourner en santé, jamais femme ne fut mieulx traictée que vous" (104–05; "Before he left he asked me to send you this letter together with the enclosed diamond . .

²⁴ The quotation from St. Basil and a well-developed discussion on medieval hostility toward laughter may be found in Barry Sanders, *Sudden Glory: Laughter as Subversive Theory* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 128. See also Albrecht Classen's Introduction to this volume.

. and if God brings him safely home, I assure you that no woman in the world will ever have received such love and care as you will receive," 175)

Despite her mendacity, we have no indication that the virtuous lady's intentions are anything but noble: by forwarding her counterfeit note and diamond ring to the man's spouse, she is safe-guarding her own honor, redressing her admirer's transgression, and bringing happiness to his abandoned wife. Yet her high-minded motivation is poor armor indeed against the spontaneous urge to laugh at her rival's delusions—a reflex that occurs on two separate occasions. In the first instance, within the privacy of her own home, the lady cannot help giggling at her rival's ecstatic response to the missive and diamond: "N'entendist ce que lui dist son serviteur," Marguerite tells us, "sans rire bien fort" (N. 13, 105; "She could not listen to what her servant said without laughing heartily," my translation). The fact that she herself orchestrated this humanitarian trickery in no way diminishes the hoax's inherent humor, which stems from the same radical gap between seeming and being, culture and nature, the expected and the unexpected, that informs puns and practical jokes. Without condemning her protagonist's outburst, Marguerite reprises and transforms the scene later in the same narrative, both by setting it in church, a sacred and more public space than her home; and by focusing less on the lady's inability to stop giggling than on the lengths she goes to control and camouflage the wayward impulse. In addition to retreating to a solitary side chapel to compose herself, the virtuous lady goes so far as to find a friend to replace her during the audience with the Regent, thereby removing the proximate cause of her laughter. While this solution may appear extreme, it not only spares both the lady and her admirer's widow considerable embarrassment, but also echoes classical and ecclesiastical admonitions against excessive merriment.

Despite their negative associations, all three examples of transgressive, misinterpreted, or repressed humor cited above are fraught with ambiguity. When viewed myopically, from a prudish or sternly Christian perspective, the widow's propensity for flirtatious laughter in *Nouvelle* 4, the seducer's triumphant "aha" in *Nouvelle* 14, and the virtuous lady's merriment over the gullibility of her rival's wife in *Nouvelle* 54 all seem reprehensible. Yet when we "zoom out" to judge these behaviors in a broader context, as Marguerite's frame discussions and ten storytellers encourage us to do, it is the semiotic complexity rather than the sinfulness of laughter that garners our attention. The seducer's laughter, first of all, is not only a sign of his perfidy, but also a phenotypic signifier so idiosyncratic that it identifies him to the Milanese matron lying beside him in bed. Triggered in part by his partner's tears, Bonnivet's laughter at first glance appears private, cruel, and humorless, serving not as a mainspring for collective bonding and hoots of merriment, but rather as an anti-model of self-absorption and ruthlessness. Significantly, we see no mention of laughter among the devisants in the frame

discussion following this *nouvelle*. Yet because it is contagious and transformative, Bonnavet's laughter ultimately infects the irate widow as well, as she abandons her outrage in favor of shared pleasure.

While the would-be rapist in Novella 4 views his victim's laughter as a sexual invitation, secondly, we as readers understand that it stems both from good manners, as prescribed by Baldassare Castiglione in *The Book of the Courtier* (1528),²⁵ and from inner and spiritual "joie." Blinded by his own desire, the attacker confuses upper and lower bodily strata, mistaking joy for *jouissance* and Apollonian wit for Bacchic merriment. Marguerite's focus on semiotic ambiguity is somewhat more humorous in Novella 13, where the widow's ring, a reminder to the grieving woman of her husband's devotion and fidelity, instead symbolizes infidelity to the story's female protagonist, who was the first recipient of the jewel. As reprehensible as the religious protagonist believes her laughter to be, moreover, the storytellers as a group share and legitimize her levity, subjecting not her humor but her excessive altruism to criticism. Parlamente, the intratextual storyteller most closely associated with the author, in fact removes the stigma of sin from the woman's laughter, attributing it instead to the joys of those who do good works ("les joyes des bien faisans," 108).

In the face of natural disaster, betrayal, humiliation, and despair, Marguerite rehabilitates and explores the mainsprings of laughter in the *Heptaméron*. Guffaws of surprise, good cheer, derision, bravado, and a host of other emotions punctuate the narratives, often in patently *unfunny* situations, while the *devisants*, who alternate between serious commentary and offbeat wise cracks, attune readers to the multiple levels, types, functions, and traditions of humor in the stories and in life. Certainly, there is a good deal of laughing at oddities, gullibility, the butts of jokes, and human follies—the laughter of cruelty, in other words. Parlamente

²⁵ In addition to his extensive discourse on the nature of laughter and the protocols of humor for a courtier, Castiglione also writes approvingly of female laughter in Book 3 of his *Libro del cortegiano*, one of the models Marguerite likely drew upon in writing her *Heptaméron*. Originally published in 1528, the work was translated into French in 1537, either near or just before the time Marguerite began composing her short-story collection. In regard to female laughter, Castiglione contends that the circumspect and charming mirth of an "honest" woman is "prized by everyone:" "Si vede che una parola, *un riso*, un atto di benivolentia, per minimo ch'egli sia, d'una donna onesta, è più apprezzato da ognuno, che tutte le dimostrazioni e carezze di quelle che così senza riservo mostran poca vergogna" (v. 254; my italics). He continues to say that charming and clever laughter is indispensable for a well-mannered woman at court, whose primary function is to entertain those around her: "E così sarà nel conversare, *nel ridere*, nel giocare, nel motteggiare, in somma in ogni cosa graziatissima; ed intertenerà accomodatamente e con motti e facezie convenienti a lei ogni persona che le occorrerà." (ix, 258; my italics). *Il libro del cortegiano*, ed. Giulio Preti (Torino: Einaudi, 1960), also available online at: http://linux.studenti.polito.it/liberliber/biblioteca/c/castiglione/il_libro_del_cortegiano/pdf/il_lib_p.pdf (last accessed on Jan. 30, 2010).

reminds us that people laugh when they see someone stumble (“quant [on]veoit quelcun tresbucher,” 335), either physically or verbally (“quant la langue fourche en parlant,” 335); yet Marguerite’s intratextual storytellers and readers clearly find moral and cognitive missteps risible as well. Similar to (but more reprehensible than) the virtuous lady discussed earlier, who struggled not to laugh at the stupidity of her admirer’s widow, both the adulterous wife in Novella 15 and the young girl in Novella 7 burst out laughing at the gullibility of their “keepers,” or their husband and mother, respectively, who monitor their chastity so ineptly. The girls’ merriment stems in part from their Bakhtinian transgression of cultural taboos and generational hierarchies; from their sense of triumph and elation at having ingeniously tricked an authority figure, in a carnivalesque reversal of roles; and from the sense of superiority that comes with uncovering and preying upon an ostensibly wise elder’s mental lapse. In particular, the willingness of the second girl’s mother to imagine that she herself is the object of a neighboring merchant’s passion, rather than her adolescent daughter, at once highlights her foolishness and elicits jeers from the teenager and her lover.²⁶

Without really typifying laughter in the *Heptaméron*, this apparent mockery of a well-meaning, but deluded, parent nevertheless illustrates two important facets of Marguerite’s humor: born of difference, or the tension between opposites, laughter often emerges from a conflict between nature and culture, or a difference of opinion between men and women; and through laughter, traditional dichotomies between foolishness and wisdom are inverted and interrogated. It is, hence, the result of the dialectic nature of human life. Marguerite links her defense of laughter to the Bakhtinian theme of fools and folly by observing that “les folz” live longer than wise people, largely because they laugh when they are happy (“s’ilz sont joieulx, ilz rient,” 249) rather than repressing their ebullience.²⁷

This association of fools with laughter, and of wise men with sobriety, finds its roots in classical and particularly stoic philosophy (“les philosophes du temps passé” [253]), which Geburon summarizes in Novella 34: “Il y en a,” he opines, “qui ont le cuer tant adonné à l’amour de sapience, que . . . on ne les sçauroit faire rire, car ilz ont une joye en leurs cueurs et ung contentement si moderé, que nul accident ne les peut muer” (253; “There are people . . . whose hearts are so devoted to the love of wisdom that . . . no one could make them laugh, for they have joy in their hearts and contentment so full of moderation that no accident can change them” [343]). While Geburon explains this unyielding sobriety as a function of extraordinary self-control and the willful suppression of natural instincts (“ilz

²⁶ See also the contributions to this volume by Mark Burde, Jean N. Goodrich, and Jean E. Jost.

²⁷ For more on the representation of fools and folly during this era, particularly in the graphic arts, see Yona Pinson, *The Fool’s Journey: A Myth of Obsession in Northern Renaissance Art* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008).

estimoient grand vertu se vaincre eulx-mesmes et leur passion," 253; "so great a virtue was it in their eyes to overcome the self and the passions," 343), Marguerite herself suggests that stoicism, far from being wise, is a form of pride ("il est impossible que la victoire de nous-mesmes se face par nous-mesmes, sans ung merueilleux orgueil," 255; "it is impossible for victory over ourselves to be achieved by our own hand, without extreme pride") present in fools who consider themselves "plus saiges que les aultres" (255; "wiser than others").

In Novella 54, it is arguably the doltish husband who considers himself "wiser than others"; and it is he who is the butt of the matron's—and our—laughter. Completely certain that his wife cannot see his infidelity, when in fact she is monitoring his shadow, he engages in licentious behavior that greater intellectual acuity would prompt him to avoid, or at least camouflage more effectively. Far from being a fool, moreover, or a stereotypically giddy female as she represents herself, the laughing woman is in fact remarkably quick-witted: in constructing herself as a "sotte," she is appropriating and invoking the "knowing" folly of the wise fool, an identity that is perfectly congruent with her inane, yet ingenious, laughter. For as emotionally satisfying as it might be for her to hurl accusations at the wayward couple, confronting their transgressions overtly would irrevocably change the wife's relationship with her husband and the tranquility of her household, portrayed from the outset as a locus of happiness and love: "Le gentil homme," Marguerite tells us, "avoit femme et enfans, et une fort belle maison, et tant de biens et de plaisirs, qu'il avoit occasion de vivre content" (342; "[the gentleman] had a wife, children, a fine house and so much wealth and pleasure that he had every good reason to be content with life," 445).

For her part, the matron is so devoted to her husband, and holds his life and health in such high regard ("n'ayant regard comme à la vie et la santé de son mary," 342), that she has readily agreed to the doctor's suggestion that they sleep apart to ease the gentleman's headache ("une grande douleur au dessoubz de la racine des cheveux," 342)—a chronic physical ailment which prefigures both his moral infirmity and the sluggishness of his reasoning. True, the wife has her own bed moved to the "autre coing de la chambre" (342), or the other corner of the room from that of her husband, deluding him into imagining that his peccadilloes will remain hidden; but what the gentleman thoughtlessly overlooks in the throes of his passion is both the *direct* line of sight between the two beds ("fit mettre son lict . . . viz à viz celluy de son mary, en ligne si droicte, que l'un ne l'autre n'eust sceu mettre la teste dehors sans se veoir tous deux," 342; "she had her bed placed in the other corner of the room, directly opposite her husband's, so that neither of them could put their heads out without seeing one another," 445) and the *indirect*

shadow produced by the serving girl's candle, which allows his wife to glimpse his silhouette even when his body is camouflaged.²⁸

Here, as elsewhere in the *Heptaméron*, the theme of seeing and insight figures prominently: By experimenting with an alternative point of view, and watching shadows on the wall in a manner that echoes, and yet reverses, Plato's allegory of the cave, the wife sees the truth of her husband's incipient infidelity.²⁹ The catharsis that she experiences reverses her earlier assumptions: in place of her faithful husband, whom she envisions reading a book and engaged in intellectual pursuits, the woman discovers in the shadows a generic and stereotypically unfaithful male, who is actively exploring the body rather than the mind of his chambermaid. Moreover, the light that illuminates the chamber, allowing the man and woman to read in bed, emanates from candles being held by *servants* rather than wood or metal candleholders. By virtue of their reversed socioeconomic perspective, these silent workers, who were excluded from courtly pleasures of the prologue, function throughout the *Heptaméron* as vehicles for the excavation of real but unofficial truths, which are most visible from the underside of power and privilege. This movement from top to bottom and back again parallels the

²⁸ In what passes on one level for a proto-feminist gesture, Marguerite systematically reverses the archetypal "male gaze" here and replaces it with a distinctly female perspective; for it is through the matron's eyes, rather than her husband's, that we see the scene unfold and witness his transgression. Rather than being watched, objectified, and deprived of agency by male eyes, which construct woman as the idealized or vilified Other in traditional androcentric texts, it is the woman in this *nouvelle* who not only spies on and judges her husband, but actually stages and orchestrates the entire scene. Her insights rather than his inform our interpretation of the episode, and our judgment that he is wanting in intelligence and virtue. Part of the scene's ambiguity, however, arises from the fact that a male *devisant*, Saffredent, is the storyteller, leaving us with a female writer (Marguerite) who uses a male narrator (Saffredent) to showcase the "female gaze." Not only does the male storyteller himself have ulterior motives, but in the discussion that follows Hircan restores a traditional male perspective to the scene, hypothesizing a scenario in which the husband and servant turn around and beat the wife. This reversion to a male gaze takes place when Ennasuite opines that she would strike her own future husband with a candle under similar circumstances rather than demonstrating the forbearance of Madame Thogas; and Hircan retorts with a ludic, yet traditional, display of male hegemony that both minimizes the importance of a "simple" kiss, and asserts the patriarch's right to beat his wife if she complains about his behavior. What ensues is one of the liveliest battles of the sexes in the entire *Heptaméron*, as both male and female gazes are fractured and refracted from opposing perspectives.

²⁹ "The third important trait of laughter [in the Renaissance]," writes Bakhtin, "was its relation to the people's unofficial truth" (90). True, the Russian Formalist would probably contend that Marguerite de Navarre, as an aristocrat, was not privy to the "people's unofficial truth," and that her laughter is not inherently revelatory. Arguably, however, her "otherness" as a woman allows her to use laughter as a tool for contesting patriarchal norms in much the same way a servant, fool, or peasant might, as she challenges the official truths of male discourse and experience with the unofficial, eyewitness perspective of a woman.

dialectics of Bakhtinian laughter, which finds its roots in class consciousness and the reversal of social hierarchies.

As for the wife's guffaw, the same uxorial devotion that prompted her to sleep apart from her husband, and to move her own bed rather than his, likely informs her decision to laugh out loud rather than confront her ailing husband with his transgression: with remarkable efficacy, her enigmatic laughter nips his dalliance in the bud without embarrassing the gentleman, disturbing her own equanimity, jeopardizing the servant's position, or revealing what she has seen.³⁰ Indeed, the husband turns his attention *away* from the serving girl and back *toward* his wife upon hearing the latter's outburst, asking the matron to explain her mirth so that he can "share in" her joy ("demanda . . . qu'il lui donnast part de sa joieuseté"; "he asked [that she] kindly share the joke," 446). In this sense, her laughter has served its purpose. The incongruous guffaw startles and separates the guilty couple before they can consummate their relationship; but unlike more conventional acoustic strategies, used onstage to alert lovers that a third party is present, the matron's laughter does not overtly condemn or even acknowledge her husband's transgression.

Triggered by negative emotions and fear in particular ("elle eut paour que la verité ne fut couverte dessoubz," 343; "she was afraid that there was some reality hidden behind [the shadows]," 446), the outburst stems in part from the incongruity of a married man's adultery; and in this sense, it represents what John Parkin calls "value-based laughter," used to satirize behaviors that transgress the dominant moral code.³¹ While readers fully grasp the laugh's satiric overtones, however, the intrafictional husband does not: unaware of what his wife has witnessed, he ingenuously asks her what is so funny, hopefully interpreting her laughter as "joyeuseté" rather than derisive finger-pointing. Far from being overtly satiric or value-based, the matron's condemnatory laughter is moreover complicated and made ambivalent by its disguise as a positive, rather than a negative, emotional response. Through this ingenious subterfuge, the artful matron—by no means "sotte"—manages to salvage and renew her marriage with the prospect of shared joy, rather than compromising it with recriminations. Ultimately, her ostensibly meaningless guffaw also proves to be a richly polyvalent signifier. The wife's staged laugh not only stills her husband's roving

³⁰ The matron's discretion and decision not to challenge her husband or the serving girl with her discovery may remind some readers of Marie de France's "Lai of Eliduc." While Marguerite's matron acts partly out of love for her husband and family, however, she at no point contemplates the type of sacrifice that Eliduc's wife makes in Marie de France's text. Far from removing herself from the scene she has observed, and allowing her husband to act freely on his desires, she interrupts the tryst and implicitly reasserts her own claims on his affections.

³¹ Parkin, 4. For more on the incongruity theory of humor, see Salvatore Attardo, *Linguistic Theories of Humor*. Humor Research, 1 (Berlin and New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1994), 27–29.

eye, in a subtle show of power and female agency that belies her outward self-effacement, but also veils its own meaning by camouflaging her (in)sights with humor and feigned *sottise*. Deceptively simple on the surface, the matron's guffaw furnishes us a window onto Marguerite de Navarre's ambivalent humor, and serves as an introduction to the semiotic complexity of her prose masterwork.

Alternatively collective and private, derisive and joyous, spontaneous, fake, and suppressed, laughter in the *Heptaméron* is multilayered, contagious, transformative, and revelatory. This paradoxical link between truth and humor informs both the composition and the content of the short stories, which Jeanne d'Albret, the queen's daughter, dismisses as innocuous "romans jovials." Less dramatically than the traditional fool or court jester, Marguerite herself uses laughter and frivolity as a vehicle of revelation, both to veil and unveil her social, political, and religious insights. In addition to focusing our attention on truths that might otherwise be hidden, such as Bonnivet's identity in nouvelle 14, Marguerite's varied mentions of laughter within the text also emphasize the importance of humor as a life strategy, as a consensus builder, as a healing balm, and as a respite from tragedy.

To laugh or not to laugh—Marguerite's protagonists and antagonists answer the question in different ways. When confronted with spousal infidelity, one character poisons his wife (N. 36); another kills his rival and makes his spouse drink from her lover's skull (N. 32); a third plays an elaborate but violent joke on his wife, disguising himself as the prospective lover and beating his wife, thereby "curing" her of her fatal attraction (N. 35); a fourth takes a lover of her own, drawing the wrath of her husband (N. 15); and the woman in nouvelle 54 . . . laughs out loud. In answer to the age-old question, "What is to be done," laughter may not always be the correct response, as it was for Democritus: but in addition to making us feel better, and functioning as a veiled signifier of deeper truths and more substantive answers, humor in the *Heptaméron* favors life, renewal, and hope over death. As such, it is wise folly indeed.

Chapter 22

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You had to be there: The Elusive Humor of the *Sottie*

The *sottie* is the most misunderstood and controversial of medieval theatrical forms. In its broadest sense, it is a comic entertainment that flourished in France and a few other French-speaking sites like Geneva between the mid-fifteenth and mid-sixteenth centuries. It consisted of dialogue often combined with songs and music and at times with acrobatics (a practice not dissimilar to the *lazzi* of the later *Commedia dell'Arte*).¹ It came of age at about the same time as two other dramatic genres based on or containing comic elements, the farce and the *moralité*, and critics have struggled to identify what distinguishes the *sottie* from them.² So far, only a couple of its features seem to have produced some agreement. First, unlike the farce, its characters are not realistic types such as the conniving wife, the lecherous priest, the dishonest lawyer, or the cowardly soldier. They are instead abstract ones, generally grouped under the generic term of *sots* (fools). The *sots* are

¹ Eugénie Droz, *Le Recueil Trepperel, Les Sotties*. Bibliothèque de la Société des historiens du theater, VIII (Paris: Librairie E. Droz, 1935), lxix. Also Émile Picot, *Recueil Général des Sotties*, 3 vols. Société des anciens textes français (Paris: Librairie de Firmin Didot et Cie, 1902–1912), 1: xxv–xxix. He stresses that *sotties* had no connection to contemporary English, Dutch, or German performances.

² Jelle Koopmans, in his introduction, calls the period 1450–1550 “l’heure de gloire” of the farce and *mystère*. *Le Théâtre polémique français 1450–1550*, ed. Marie Bouhaïk-Gironès, Jelle Koopmans, and Katell Lavéant. Collection Interférence (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2008), 11. Petit de Julleville, *La Comédie et les mœurs en France au moyen âge* (1886; Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1968), 16, 48, 54–58, characterizes the *moralité* as a play with an overt didactic intent that could include some comic passages. He adds that the farce, inspired by the fabliaux, appears with this name only at the beginning of the fifteenth century and deals with “les détails vulgaires et plaisants de la vie privée”. Olga Anna Dull, *Folie et rhétorique dans la sottie*. Publications romanes et françaises, 210 (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1994), 87 sees the *sottie* as a transitional genre, between farce (based on types) and *moralité* (based on allegories).

usually accompanied by true allegorical types (for example, Abus, Monde, Commune), who tend to represent “neutral” collectivities rather than specific attributes, unlike those of *moralités*.³ Occasionally some characters of *sotties* represent instances of trades, but these are used for their symbolic meaning and not to identify specific social types.⁴ Second, the stage action is less concerned with a storyline than either farce or *moralité*; rather it tends to be somewhat static, with a preponderant role given to dialogue. The plot, then, is usually thin and the play brief, on average less than four-hundred lines in verse (and like the farce, not divided into acts and scenes).

Despite the apparent limitation of format the *sottie* claims a wide thematic variety, and this has caused disagreement even on the number of such plays that have reached us. The *Recueil Général des Sotties* edited by Émile Picot contains thirty-one pieces and the *Recueil Trepperel* another sixteen, but some critics classify certain *sotties* as farces and others as *moralités*; and, to add to the confusion, some *sotties* contain the word “farce” “moralité” or “farce moralisée” in the title. It seems, then, that the total number is around forty-seven, but there are another twenty or so whose classification is debated. It is not surprising, then, that the few studies on this genre tend to cluster it with other comic forms and give varied, at times contradictory, definitions. One of the earliest and most authoritative is found in Petit de Julleville’s classical work *La Comédie et les mœurs en France au moyen âge* (1886), where the author defines the *sottie* as a farce performed by *sots* and warns against trying to make too much of a distinction between the two. Later in the text, however, he seems to marvel at the exuberant creativity of this theater, and observes that “no genre was more varied, or more intriguing to study” (“aucun genre ne fut plus varié; aucun n’est plus curieux à étudier”).⁵

³ Estelle Doudet, “Statut et figures de la voix satirique dans le théâtre polémique français (xve–xvie siècles),” *Le Théâtre polémique*, ed. Bouhaïk-Gironès, Koopmans, and Lavéant, 24.

⁴ Jean-Claude Aubailly, *Le Monologue le dialogue et la sottie: Essai sur quelques genres dramatiques de la fin du moyen âge et du début du XVIe siècle. Bibliothèque du XVIe siècle*, 41 (Paris: Editions Honoré Champion, 1976), 363–65. Heather Arden, *Fools’ Play: a Study of Satire in the sottie* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 39–40. An example of symbolic trade is in the “Sottie a cinq personnages des coppieurs et lardeurs qui sont copiez et farceez” where “coppieurs” and “lardeurs” are used in the sense of “scammers.” Droz, *Recueil Trepperel*, 153–79.

⁵ Julleville, *La Comédie et les mœurs*, 6. He observes also (46) that a complete distinction among genres is an abstraction of later eras, as some *moralités* are more like *mystères* and others more like farces. For a similar opinion see also Gustave Cohen, *Recueil de farces françaises du XVIe siècle*. Mediaeval Academy of America. Publication, no. 47 (Cambridge, MA: Mediaeval Academy of America, 1949), xi. Jelle Koopmans in “Les Éléments Farcesques dans la Sottie Française,” in *Farce and Farcical Elements*, ed. Wim Hüskén and Konrad Schoell. *Ludus*, 6 (Amsterdam and New York: Editions Rodopi, 2002), 121–41; here 136, defines the *sottie* as “un genre hypergénérique à la farce.”

Howard G. Harvey dedicates to it only twenty-six pages out of over one-hundred-sixty in his work *The Theater of the Basoche* (1941), reserving the greatest portion for farce and *moralité*: he, too, warns against a clear-cut distinction between comic genres, adding that the *sottie* was a “curtain riser,” and often just a parade, among a series of performances.⁶ In the preface to his vast collection of *sotties*, Picot argues instead that this is one of the most ancient dramatic genres, and against Julleville defends its individuality, based on the presence of characters that are *sots* and also on a bizarre dialogue that recalls the thirteenth-century *fatrasie*. He adds that *sotties* were performed in theaters and on the streets (hence by necessity quite short) on special festivities or funerals.

He was the first to suggest a categorization of *sotties* into two kinds, satirical pieces and (more frequent) parades, the first played by amateur burghers and the latter by professionals because they required acrobatic skills.⁷ Eugénie Droz, editor of the *Recueil Trepperel*, a sixteenth-century collection of theatrical pieces among which several *sotties*, dismisses the genre as “an entertainment to which one did not lend but an inattentive ear” (“un amusement auquel ils ne prêtaient qu’une oreille distraite”), and returns to the earlier tradition of lumping it with the farce. In the preface to the compilation she also laments the lack of systematic studies on late-medieval spoken French, of which *sotties* form such an intriguing example. Seventy years after her comments there are still no critical translations of this corpus, not only into other languages, but not even into modern French. And in her edition, like Picot’s, the explanatory footnotes compete for space with puzzled comments about the possible meaning of numerous passages.⁸

Among more recent critical works, two deserve particular notice because of the breadth and depth of their scope. The first is Jean-Claude Aubailly’s *Le Monologue, le dialogue et la sottie* (1976), a monograph devoted to theatrical forms heavily based on verbal exchanges, almost half of which is taken up by the *sottie*. The author deplores the lack of agreement on the nature of this genre that has led critics to challenge its very status as separate dramatic form, and proposes instead to study it from its internal structure (versification, stage action, characters, costumes, and so on) to arrive to a definition on its own terms. He argues (against Picot) that the presence of a *sot* alone does not make a *sottie*, while certain plays titled “farce” and “moralité” are indeed *sotties* even if their characters are not called *sots*. He suggests

⁶ Howard Graham Harvey, *The Theatre of the Basoche: the Contribution of the Law Societies to French Medieval Comedy*. Harvard Studies in Romance Languages, XVII (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1941), 174. He gives the order of plays as follows: a *cry*, then a *sottie*, then a *moralité* or *mystère* and, in closing, a farce.

⁷ Picot, *Recueil Général des Sotties*, 1: viii–x, xvii.

⁸ Droz, *Recueil Trepperel*, lxxv, xliii (she states that they are “très souvent incompréhensibles”); Picot (*Recueil Général des Sotties*, 1: xxxi.) admits that some passages are “des énigmes indéchiffrables.”

instead an innovative topology based on the presence of conflict among two groups of characters: on one side the *sots*, who represent the “dissenting element” (“élément contestataire”) and on the other allegorical representations of a class or collectivity, who are the element under judgment (“mis en cause”).⁹ Indeed, some kind of conflict, even if at times rather contrived, does appear to give impulse to action in the majority of *sotties*, either through a scheme involving *sots* to trick some other character or to rule society or even simply through summons of *sots* by an important figure. The summons can be a source of dissension as the *sots* typically come on stage bantering with each other:

Teste Verte: Hee, (he)!

Fine Myne: Qui est la?

Teste: Sus.

Fine: Parle bas.

Teste: Allons.

Fine: Ou ?

Teste: Devant, vivement.

Fine: En quel lieu ?

Teste: A coup, (a coup) on le commande.

Fine: Et qui esse qui nous demande ?

 Esse no(stre) mere ?

Teste: Se peult bien estre.¹⁰

[Hey ! / Who is there ? / Come on. / Quiet. / Let's go. / Where? / Forward, quickly. / Where? / Quick, (quick) it is an order. / And who is asking for us? / Our mother? It just may be.]

Or they may even trade insults with the allegorical opponent:

Teste Verte: Sa, a coup venez.

Chacun: Ou ?

Fine : Avecques nous esbatre.

Chacun: A qui parlez vous ?

Teste: A toy.

Chacun: Allez, allez villain follastre.

Fine : Et ! monsieur le gentillastre,

 Ce n'est pas ainsi qu'on me nomme.¹¹

⁹ Nevertheless, he is the first to admit that “l'élément contestataire” is present only in three-fourths of the sixty-four pieces examined as representative of the genre. Aubailly, *Le Monologue le dialogue et la sottie*, 350–51.

¹⁰ Droz, “Sottie des *sots* triomphants qui trompent chacun” lines 17–21, *Recueil Trepperel*, 33–34. I am grateful to Elizabeth Zegura (The University of Arizona) for her help with translation of the examples used in this article.

¹¹ Droz, “Sottie des *sots* triomphants qui trompent chacun,” lines 119–24, *Recueil Trepperel*, 39–40.

[Come on, come right away / Where? / To have fun with us. / To whom are you talking? / To thee. / Go, go, silly rogue. / Wow! Mister upper crust, this is not how I am addressed.]

However, as Estelle Doudet has noted, the dichotomy *sot*-accuser and allegory-accused is far from absolute, as at times the roles are inverted.¹²

The second significant recent work on the *sottie* is Heather Arden's *Fools' Play: a Study of Satire in the sottie* (1982), which views this form as a manifestation of social conflict and focuses on its satirical intent. She distinguishes between non-satirical *sotties* (generally shorter, with emphasis on action or physical humor like games, processions, scuffles, entries and exits, and acrobatics) and satirical ones, which are subdivided into three categories based on whether the satire is directed at society as a whole, at a type of person or *métier*, or at real events or people.¹³ Like Aubailly, who labeled the *sottie* a "committed theater" ("théâtre engagé") that expressed the frustrations of the educated middle class, Arden affirms that its targets were the pretensions of the high bourgeoisie. Yet, how to interpret the few and ambiguous references to contemporary events (necessary to understand the satire) has been a source of grief to critics and one of frustration for the dating of most plays. Droz marveled at how few references to precise happenings one finds in them, and (I would add) even when an allusion is unambiguous it does not strike the reader as particularly pointed, as, for example, when Monsieur Rien in the *sottie* "Pour le cry de la Basoche" says that peace is abhorred by the wealthy.¹⁴ The ambiguity that permeates these plays casts doubts on the identity of the very targets of their satire. In the "Farce des gens nouveaulx qui mengent le monde et le logent de mal en pire" (1461?) three *sots* who identify themselves only as "new people" ("gens nouveaulx") set out to govern Monde. They arrogantly boast of a grandiose political program that will deliver nothing short of miracles, such as charitable lawyers, zealous priests, and brave soldiers. But the first thing that they do is to demand money of Monde, thus arousing his reasonable mistrust, and then lead him from bad to worse. Who are they? Nothing in their speech identifies them as a self-conscious class or faction: they only claim that "the old" ("les vieulx") have enjoyed their moment and now it is their turn to rule. They could just as well

¹² Estelle Doudet, "Statut et figures de la voix satirique dans le théâtre polémique français (xve–xvii siècles)," *Le Théâtre polémique*, ed. Bouhaïk-Gironès, Koopmans and Lavéant, 23.

¹³ Arden, *Fools' Play*, 56–57. She subdivides the non satirical *sotties* in comedies of situation, character, and language, Aubailly offers his own categories, roughly fitting into *sottie-parade*, *sottie-jugement*, and *sottie-action*. Aubailly, *Le Monologue le dialogue et la sottie*, 287–349.

¹⁴ Picot, "Pour le cry de la Basoche" lines 480–89, *Recueil Général des Sotties*, 3: 260–61. Aubailly's terminology is in *Le Monologue le dialogue et la sottie*, 460, and Droz's comments in *Recueil Trepperel*, lxx.

represent the new upper bourgeoisie, as Arden believes, or the ruling team around a new king, as posited by Petit de Julleville, or someone else altogether.¹⁵

Generally critics agree that *sotties* were funny (given revealing adjectives that accompany their titles, and the fact that the extant ones belong to collections of comic plays), but usually do not delve on this aspect, and, once again, opinions differ. Julleville breezes through it with the statement that medieval audiences attended *sotties* and farces “only for fun” (“seulement pour s’amuser”), while Droz barely mentions humor at all. Arden does not delve into it per se, as she focuses on its satirical intent rather than its form. On the other hand Aubailly dedicates to it a separate, if short, chapter, but perhaps significantly relegated to the last portion of his work. There he considers all techniques used to elicit laughter, from characters to setting and dialogue, to conclude that the *sottie* was after a whole gamut of comic effects, and that the funniest ones were borrowed from the farce: caricature of misfits, sexual innuendos, or open obscenity. But—he warns—the laughter of the *sottie* is not an end in itself but rather a tool: it masks social attacks by protecting its message from censorship and allowing it more liberties. The laughter of the *sottie* is a “grimacing laughter” (“rire grinçant”), in fact an “uneasy laughter, originating from mixed feelings” (“rire troublé, fait de sentiments mêlés”) in contrast to the “frank and good-natured laughter” (“rire franc et bonhomme”) of the farce and the “occasional relief laughter” (“rire occasionnel de détente”) of the *moralité*.¹⁶ He appears to conclude that the very broad spectrum of comic techniques makes this theater distinct from the farce and the *moralité* but places humor in an ancillary position with respect to the central conflict between groups of characters.

I think that the humor of the *sottie* deserves to be examined on its own merits, as it represents perhaps its most striking area of departure from the other two comic genres. But, perhaps in part because it remains so elusive and un-amenable to being categorized, when discussing *sotties* critics have generally avoided explicit reference to the three major currents that have dominated the discourse on laughter (while still making implicit use of some).¹⁷ The one that seems to have made more of an impression on them is also the most ancient and persistent from

¹⁵ Arden, *Fools' Play*, 75, 79, 116, 127–28; Julleville, *La Comédie et les mœurs*, 133–37. The play is “Farce nouvelle moralisée des gens nouveaux qui mangent le monde et le logent de mal en pire” in Picot, *Recueil Général des Sotties*, 1: 113–36.

¹⁶ Julleville, *La Comédie et les mœurs*, 13; Aubailly, *Le Monologue le dialogue et la sottie*, 443–58, 461.

¹⁷ John Morreal observes that today we still lack a comprehensive theory on laughter, despite centuries of attempts. John Morreal, *Taking Laughter Seriously* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983), 1. Two examples of critical works on laughing that analyze the three major part theories are: Michael Billig, *Laughter and Ridicule: Towards a Social Critique of Humour*. Theory, culture & society (London and Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2005), and Norman N. Holland, *Laughing: a Psychology of Humor* (Ithaca, NY, and London: Cornell University Press, 1982).

Plato to Hobbes, the so-called superiority theory: we laugh at those whom we perceive as defective and therefore inferior. This theory conceives of laughter as a form of controlled aggression and has found its foremost modern representative in Henri Bergson.

In *Le Rire* (1899) he stresses the purely intellectual quality of laughing, which must be accompanied by insensitivity and indifference, and identifies in “robot-like rigidity” (“raideur de mécanique”) the foremost quality of its victim.¹⁸ This theory seems to be predominant in the critical interpretation of the *sottie*. Aubailly alludes to Bergsonian canons when he states that the *sot* becomes a comical figure only when he impersonates a degradation that relegates him to the margins of society, or when he affirms that the *sottie* elicits the most laughter when it appropriates characters from the farce.¹⁹ Arden takes a more literary approach to the question. In her views the majority of *sotties* are satirical, therefore likely to be considered more relevant, but frequently for us less comic, as we often cannot follow their reference to socio-political circumstances. Without invoking explicitly the superiority theory she seems to imply that the humor of the *sottie* was an aggressive one, because more concerned with political satire, which comports an element of attack.²⁰ Julleville, too, had claimed that *sotties* more so than farces were qualified by an “aggressive tendency” (“tendance agressive”), and aggression seems to be the basis of satire according to Robert Elliott, who connects it to ritualized invective and magic.²¹ With the exception of Harvey, who took the opposing view that the satirical intent of the *sottie* has been exaggerated, there seems to be a consensus that the laughter of the *sottie* falls into the category of controlled aggression, consonant with the superiority theory.²²

Nevertheless this long-lived theory has fallen under much criticism, as it has failed to explain too many forms of laughing clearly unrelated to feelings of superiority. As early as 1711 an alternate theory was proposed by the Earl of Shaftesbury that equated laughter with the relief produced by venting of nervous energy; and later in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Kant and

¹⁸ Henri Bergson, *Le Rire: essai sur la signification du comique*. Quadrige. Grands textes (1924; Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1969), 3–4, 8.

¹⁹ Aubailly, *Le Monologue le dialogue et la sottie*, 444. As an extension, we could look at the allegories that appear in the *sottie* in Bergsonian terms, following Angus Fletcher’s observation that the allegory has “an absolutely one-track mind” and “rigid habits.” Angus Fletcher, *Allegory: the Theory of a Symbolic Mode* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1966), 40.

²⁰ Arden, *Fools’ Play*, 9, 61, 65.

²¹ Julleville, *La Comédie et les mœurs*, 72. Robert C. Elliott, *The power of satire: magic, ritual, art* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1960), 6, 78–79.

²² Harvey (*The Theatre of the Basoche*, 176–77) argues that the satire of the *sottie* was generally mild and narrowly focused.

Schopenhauer formulated a new theory based on incongruity, which switched the focus from the emotional to the cognitive aspect of the phenomenon.²³

The incongruity and relief theories alternated in popularity, with relief theory seemingly ahead, thanks to its “scientific” elaboration by Spencer and final perfection by Freud in his classical work *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* (1905). Freud was also responsible for moving the debate from philosophy to psychology, where it rests today. But his theory, too, while the most complete so far, has been criticized as inadequate. For example, his argument that the basic pleasure of tendentious jokes (the only type that he examines at length) is the release of saved psychic energy “by lifting suppressions and repressions” has been discredited: if his assumptions were true, sexual and aggressive jokes would be most enjoyed by those who suppress the most those two feelings, but experiments have proven that, on the contrary, those who vent more openly those emotions also enjoy related jokes the most.²⁴ Interestingly, the relief theory has not made headway among modern scholars in the interpretation of the *sottie*, but something like it was apparently invoked by medieval writers in defending the irreverent aspects of the Feast of Fools (in which some see a precursor of this genre) against periodic attacks of the Church.²⁵ Aubailly seems to embrace it as applicable to the farce, when he defines its laughter as “franc et bonhomme,” and even (partly) when talking of the “rire occasionnel de détente” of the *moralité*.

The difficulty of pinpointing what is funny about *sotties* was evident to both Aubailly and Arden. The farce proper (which may be called “domestic”) targets lowly people, and perhaps for that reason its humor does not disdain obscene innuendos and situations easily understood by the least sophisticated viewers. While the *farce morale* (or *moralité joyeuse*, *moralité satirique*) which targets specific vices or institutions, belongs truly to the satirical genre, also easily identifiable.²⁶ The *sottie*, on the other hand, maintains a more intangible mocking tone, which renders its targets less obvious. Both critics have suggested that, since its satire was

²³ Morreal, *Taking Laughter Seriously*, 14–20.

²⁴ Sigmund Freud, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, trans. James Strachey (1905; New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1960), 137. Criticism of this theory is elaborated in Morreal, *Taking Laughter Seriously*, 21–32 and also in Billig, *Laughter and Ridicule*, 139–71. Freud’s work, however, makes some observations and predictions that have been validated by experiment, and is cited extensively in the footnotes of the present article.

²⁵ Anton C. Zijderveld, *Reality in a Looking-Glass: Rationality through an Analysis of Traditional Folly*. International Library of Sociology (London, Boston, and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982), 69. Adolphe Fabre *Les Clercs du palais* (Lyon: N. Scheuring Libraire-Éditeur, 1875), 214–19.

²⁶ While the satirical objective of these didactic pieces is identifiable, less so is the exact definition is this slippery genre. Julleville (*La Comédie et les mœurs*, 46–49) uses a vague and all-embracing terminology, while Droz (*Recueil Trepperel*, lxix) sees in the *farce morale* (or *moralisée*) a transitional form between farce and *moralité*.

at least in part directed against powerful people, the *sottie* had to veil it in ambiguous or “foolish” language to escape censure.²⁷

Some of the extant texts do suggest that what often appears to us as pure verbal divertissement or nonsensical chatter was actually infused with references to contemporary events and their actors, in a sort of “code” decipherable by the performers and their audience. But the message could just as easily be interpreted by contemporary censors, witness the repeated bans against performances and arrests of writers and actors.²⁸ Since the often-obscure style of *sotties* defies old assumptions about ridicule that have dominated classical theories of humor, it may be safe to conclude that laughter may have emotional and cognitive components, after all, both exploited to a varying degree by various types of staged comedies, and turn to a more limited psychological empiricism, which in recent decades has replaced general theories of humor (while still retaining some elements of the neglected incongruity theory). From the results of experiments a consensus seems to have coalesced around some common characteristics of what we perceive as funny, which suggests why *sotties* could have been amusing in their days but today they fail to make us laugh.²⁹

First, the recipient of humor has to be placed in a playful mode, that is, be aware that what is about to follow is in jest, which presupposes that the individual is in a familiar, non-threatening environment.³⁰ And here lies the first problem in dealing with the humor of the *sottie*: when we are exposed to this challenging theatrical form, which demands knowledge of key aspects of its milieu, from nuances of language to the relevance of people to whom it alludes, we modern readers enter a “learning mode,” which renders us alert and hinders the relaxation needed to be entertained. The difficulty is compounded by the fact that stage instructions for the extant *sotties* are minimal, so that (except in few cases) we cannot imagine the facial expression and movements of the actors, which constitute such an important signal to the audience that what follows is in jest. As an example, the following stylized exchange among five *sots* suggests a private joke, perhaps rich in allusions, which unfortunately escape us:

²⁷ Arden, *Fools' Play*, 63–67, and Aubailly, *Le Monologue le dialogue et la sottie*, 317–18.

²⁸ There were injunctions and arrests against *sots* performers in 1443, 1473, 1474, 1475, 1476, 1477, and 1540. Arden, *Fools' Play*, 30.

²⁹ *The Psychology of Humor*, ed. Jeffrey H. Goldstein and Paul E. McGhee (New York and London: Academic Press, 1972), 268–82, gives an extensive annotated bibliography on psychological research on humor for the years 1900–1971. It contains nearly four-hundred items from one-hundred journals published in English alone, thirty-percent of which from after 1930.

³⁰ Paul E. McGhee, “On the Cognitive Origins of Incongruity Humor: Fantasy Assimilation versus Reality Assimilation,” *The Psychology of Humor*, ed. Goldstein and McGhee, 76–77. Freud (*Jokes*, 218–19) also had posited that a “cheerful mood” and “expectation of the comic” were conditions that favored comic pleasure.

Le Premier Sot: J'en ay.
 Le .Ile. Sot: J'en say.
 Le .IIIe. Sot: J'en voy.
 Le .IIIIe. Sot: J'en tiens.
 Le .Ve. Sot: Et moy, j'en faictz comme de cire.
 Le Premier Sot: Voulés vous pas estre des myens ?
 J'en ay.
 Le .Ile. Sot: J'en say.
 Le .IIIe. Sot: J'en voy.
 Le .IIIIe. Sot: J'en tiens.
 Le .Ve. Sot: Moi, j'espore avoir plus de biens
 C'on n'en seroyt conter ou dire.
 Le Premier Sot: J'en ay.
 Le .Ile. Sot: J'en sçay.
 Le .IIIe. Sot: J'en voy.
 Le .IIIIe. Sot: J'en tiens.
 Le .Ve. Sot: Et moy, j'en faictz comme de cire.
 Le Premier Sot: Dictes moy lequel est le pire:
 Le trop boyre ou le trop menger.
 Le .Ile. Sot: Le commun, et non l'estranger,
 En pouroyt dire quelque chose.
 Le .IIIe. Sot: Je le diroys bien, mais je n'ose,
 Car le parler m'est deffendu.³¹

[I have some. / I know some. / I see some. / I own some. / And I have molded it like wax. / You don't want to be one of us? / I have it. / I know it. / I want it. / I hold it. / And I shaped it like wax. / Me, I hope to have more goods that one can count or tell. / I have it / I know it / I want it / I hold it / And I shaped like wax / Tell me what is worse / To drink too much or to eat too much / The people, and not foreigners / May be able to say something about it / I would say it as well, but I don't dare / Because I am forbidden from talking.]

Second, the joke has to trigger suddenly a happy sense of discovery but not elicit any other feelings (for example, sympathy or anger). The process of humor is close to that of problem-solving, "especially the sense of exuberance and triumph that goes with mastery." The key to the sense of discovery is the short-circuiting process: the faster the association that leads to resolving the incongruity, the greater the surprise and the funnier the joke. It has been determined through experiments that a moderate level of challenge is optimal to produce the desired effect.³² If this is true, then the *sottie* has potential for being funnier than its two

³¹ Picot, "Farce morale et joyeuse des sobres sotz" Lines 1–14 in *Recueil Général des Sotties* 3: 53–55.
³² Holland, *Laughing*, 69–71. The same conclusion is in Jerry M. Suls, "A Two-Stage Model for the Appreciation of Jokes and Cartoons: An Information-Processing Analysis," *The Psychology of*

contemporary comedies, of the “domestic” farce because its situations are less predictable and therefore the challenge to the audience higher; and of the *moralité* because the audience is not asked to share its partisan feelings (which may detract from the enjoyment of the joke). But its quality is precisely what handicaps its interpretation by modern audiences: the humor of the *sottie*, so odd and directed toward targets that are no longer obvious is too challenging and defies our expectations of discovery. As John Morreal puts it, “adults from different cultures often fail to appreciate each other’s humor, because they don’t have the same picture of the world and so do not find the same things incongruous.” In other words, “to share humor is to share a form of life.”³³ Familiarity with the milieu and the language comes from repeated readings, but unfortunately familiarization carries also the end of surprise, which kills the comic effect.

The ambiguity of meaning in turn may lead to distortions in interpretation that elicit inappropriate emotional responses (which, as previously noted, are incompatible with humor). Where the joke is not obvious we may mistakenly take statements at face value and (for example) commiserate with the characters. The following example illustrates the dilemma: two *sots* (here called *supposts*) comment on current events in general terms, but while the first complains pathetically about widespread misery, the second contradicts him, not with open denials, but rather by turning the first’s statements around, as if not quite understanding what he had intended to say:

Le .II ^e . Suppost:	Tout en tout le peuple importune, Le temps, les gens; dont la commune Est tant faschee que rien plus.
Le Premier Suppost:	Jamays fut plus gratieux temps, Les gens et tout pareillement ?
Le .II ^e . Suppost:	Jamays aussi, comme j’entendz, Il ne fut tant de malcontens Comme il ets ; c’est tout aultrement.
Le Premier Suppost:	Tout n’est il pas suffisamment Bien gouverné entierement Et pourveu comme raison veult ? ³⁴

Humor, ed. Goldstein and McGhee, 88 based on experiments on the appreciation of cartoons. And Freud (*Jokes*, 234) alluded to this when he talked about the origin of comic being a rapid comparison between “two different ideational methods.”

³³ Morreal, *Taking Laughter Seriously*, 61. Earlier (50) he states that the joke fails if based on an unfamiliar incongruity, or if the joke teller fills in with too many explained steps.

³⁴ Picot, “Pour le cry de la Basoche,” lines 51–61 in *Recueil Général des Sotties*, 3: 241. This passage brings to mind Olga A. Dull’s comment (*Folie et rhétorique dans la sottie*, 36) that because of the mediation of folly, the *sottie* renders difficult to distinguish between the object of criticism and of praise.

[Absolutely everything bothers the people, / Time, people, for which the population / Is more vexed than ever. / Was there ever a better time, / People and everything likewise? / Also never, in my opinion, / Never were the more dissatisfied people / As now; it is exactly the contrary. / Isn't everything adequately / Entirely well governed / And seen after according to reason?]

Third, the joke should have “high-salience content” for the audience. According to Ernst Kris, the comic is “highly specific to a particular time, place, or topic,” cannot deal “with the eternally forbidden (murder, say) or with material to which the superego is indifferent. It must deal with something represented *now* in the superego. Hence the fashion plates of twenty-five to fifty years ago, our parents’ youth, are funny. Those of two hundred years ago are not.” Studies on jokes as related to cultures have found that people choose subjects that have salience to them (Jews joke about Jews and soldiers about death and army food). They have also found that different cultures choose different subjects for jokes (Chinese joke about relationships while Westerners about sex and aggression).³⁵ Not surprisingly, from the thematic repertoire of the *sottie* it appears that fifteenth-century French chose to mock fifteenth-century French and their weaknesses, among which deceitfulness and covetousness seem to be prominent. But, once again, while we may understand the general idea, we fail to identify so closely with that society as to enjoy vicarious participation in pointed barbs against it and from within it.

The complexity of the challenge may force a stepped approach to delving into the humor in the *sottie* and examine it from the three aspects of who delivers it, to whom, and how. The first aspect revolves around the overwhelming role of *sots*, both as “straight men” and objects of ridicule, as they seem to monopolize the funny lines, even if often other characters appear to act as sounding boards or victims of their pranks. Here I skirt the issue of whether the presence of *sots* was a determinant in the definition of *sottie* to focus on the evidence of their ubiquitous presence, even if in some *sotties* they are not explicitly named *sots*. The term *sot* seems to have been chosen to differentiate this type from the *fou* (or *fol*) and later from the *badin*, that is, from a marginal character possessed by “natural folly” whose function appears one of critique outside the main action, and from the simple-minded idiot of farces.³⁶ It also appears to give way to *galant* or *gorrier* in

³⁵ Holland, *Laughing*, 55, 66–67. The citation from Ernst Kris, *Psychoanalytic Explorations in Art* (New York: International Universities Press, 1952), refers to caricature. Freud (*Jokes*, 111) makes a similar point when he talks about self-criticism and tendentious jokes.

³⁶ Jelle Koopmans, *Le Théâtre des exclus au Moyen Age: Hérétiques, sorcières et marginaux* (Paris: Imago, 1997), 99 attributes to the *fou* on stage the “fonction de pont entre la fiction et les spectateurs.” Aubailly (*Le Monologue le dialogue et la sottie*, 352–55) sees in this figure a heir of Carnival and a prototype of the *sot*, who was originally cast to lend comic relief to a serious morality. Konrad Schoell, “Humour in Farce, Sottie and Fastnachtspiel,” *European Medieval Drama – Dramma*

later pieces (those dating from the end of the fifteenth century), but its characterization remained the same.³⁷ The common characteristic of *sots* is that of being dissociated from everyday reality: in Arden's words, "seemingly unemployed and orphaned, they are defined by what they do on stage, even more so by what they say."³⁸ These figures may remain anonymous and be labeled only by their order of stage entry (Premier, Second), or are identified by symbolic names that suggest cunning or empty-headedness (for example, Fine Mine, Teste Creuse, Teste Ligiere), or by an attribute of a social caste (for example, Sot Dissolu to represent the clergy), or by an symbolic occupation like Escumeur de Latin or Garde-Cul.³⁹ The *sots* were recognizable by their bi-color costumes, floured faces, and distinctive caps with donkey ears, articles of clothing that recall the pre-existent Feast of Fools.⁴⁰ This association has generated yet more confusion and attempts at fitting the *sottie* within an older tradition of unrestrained merry-making. However Aubailly argues that the two had rather followed a parallel development in distinct geographical regions. The Feast of Fools, of religious and popular origin and celebrated on specific dates, was a carnivalesque event that did include the presence of fools and masquerades, but the similarity ends here. *Sotties* had no religious connotation and were performed at any time and not necessarily in conjunction with a carnival. Arden, without specifying a direct connection, remarks that the *sottie* became popular at a time when the Feast of Fools had fallen into disuse.⁴¹

Medievale Europeo – Papers from the Fourth International Conference on 'Aspects of European Medieval Drama', ed. Sydney Higgins and Fiorella Paino (Camerino: Università degli Studi di Camerino – Centro Linguistico di Ateneo, August 1999), 317–32; here 324, defines the *badin* as "a kind of fool or clown who may present himself in a given play as a servant, as a young man in the family or as the husband, perhaps a handyman or a peasant."

³⁷ Aubailly (*Le Monologue le dialogue et la sottie*, 351–52) remarks that the term *sot* appears more frequently in the *Recueil Trepperel* (which includes pieces from second half of the fifteenth century) while *galant* appears more often in the *Recueil Picot* (which includes pieces from the end of the fifteenth century to the early sixteenth century). Also (281–82) they could be named *pélerins*, *compagnons*, *esbahis*, or *suppôts de la Basoche*. In some *sotties* one may find both *sots* and *galants* (for example, "Farce nouvelle tresbonne et fort recreative pour rire des cris de Paris," Picot, *Recueil Général des Sotties*, 3: 125–48). Droz (*Recueil Trepperel*, lxxviii) believes that the same character, with a change of costume, could perform both in *sotties* and in farces.

³⁸ Arden, *Fools' Play*, 43.

³⁹ Arden, *Fools' Play*, 38–41. Some characters are shared between *sotties* and farces: for example Bon Temps, an allegorical figure who appears in "Sottie des sots qui remettent en point Bon Temps" in Droz, *Recueil Trepperel*, 261–82 is also present in the "Farce à cinq personnages, c'est assavoir: Faulte d'argent, Bon Temps, et des troys gallans sans soucy," and the "Satyre" by Roger de Collerye. Droz, *Recueil Trepperel*, 256.

⁴⁰ The bizarre cap seems to have been a "uniform" for *sots* used even to play farces: in the "Sottie des béguins" lines 275–95 in Picot, *Recueil Général des Sotties*, 2:294–96 the *sots* get ready to play a farce but find that their costume is defective, as it lacks one ear.

⁴¹ Aubailly, *Le Monologue le dialogue et la sottie*, 462. Arden, *Fools' Play*, 20.

To add a psychological observation, it appears that the two have quite distinct goals: that of feasts originating from fertility rituals is to celebrate life and lift spirits, but has little to do with provoking laughter (or just grinning) through a comic stimulus. The Feast of Fools and other inversion rituals that allow the representation of a “world upside down” cannot elicit the laughter that is provoked by a joke for the very reason that the mirth in this case is allowed, in fact encouraged, and people do not seem to find something funny because they are allowed to or told to do so. This is ever more true of humor that carries a satirical intent, for, as Kenneth Burke affirms paradoxically, “the conditions are ‘more favorable’ to satire under censorship than under liberalism – for the most inventive satire arises when the artist is seeking simultaneously to take risks and escape punishment for his boldness, and is never quite certain himself whether he will be acclaimed or punished.”⁴² Likewise, the sociologist Hans Speier has found that jokes are more intense in periods of tyranny, when they may serve as a substitute for rebellious action and an excuse for compliance with authority.⁴³

The satirical aspect of the *sottie* seems founded on a thoughtful cynicism, if not pessimism, that is alien to the merry-making of the Feast of Fools, while the latter, by the very fact of being “controlled rebellion,” does not and cannot supply the comical element.⁴⁴ It seems more likely, instead, that the presence of fools on stage contributed to the humor of the play in two interrelated ways, both explainable from the results of psychological experiments. First, by preparing the audience to receive whatever was being said, including scathing criticism, in a jocular spirit, as it created a playful and relaxing atmosphere; and second, by introducing an element of incongruity: serious message, non-serious messenger. Arden sees in the fool’s costume a deliberate maneuver to deflect censorship, in the sense that the actors hid behind the innocuous mask of folly to acquire more freedom of expression.⁴⁵ But, once again, it could be argued that the utilitarian purpose may overwhelm the comical intent, while the wearing of distinctive attire is explainable as sound stage technique motivated by artistic requirements.

⁴² Kenneth Burke, *The Philosophy of Literary Form*, 2nd edition (1941; Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1967), 231–32.

⁴³ Hans Speier, “Wit and Politics: An Essay on Laughter and Power,” *American Journal of Sociology* 103, No. 5 (March 1998): 1352–401. Zijderveld (*Reality in a Looking-Glass*, 55–56) comes to a similar conclusion: the traveling medieval goliards who mocked religion were not rebels or ideologues.

⁴⁴ For the pessimism of the *sottie* see Aubailly, *Le Monologue le dialogue et la sottie*, 417.

⁴⁵ Arden, *Fools’ Play*, 32. It is worth mentioning that Freud (*Jokes*, 130–31) sees protection from criticism as the basic function of all jokes. Presumably this would make the additional “protective layer” posited by some critics redundant. Also (but this is only my guess and cannot be proven) the very use of “slippery” titles, such as labeling a *sottie* “farce,” could be a maneuver to evade censorship. But this, too, did not succeed, witness the language of edicts against performance of all types of comedies lumped together (*farces, sotties, moralités*). Fabre, *Les Clercs du palais*, 249.

The character of the fool has a long history in comedy, and it is to this history, rather than to carnival, that one should turn to understand his comic role in the *sottie*.⁴⁶ Norman Holland has written that comedy derives from an archetypal ritual featuring a hero painted white (the color of death) because in tragedy he was the sacrificial victim. This “white man,” or Xanthos in comedy, was the *eiron*, an ironical man who appeared less than what he was, but who eventually triumphed over his antagonist, the “black man” or Melanthos. The black man was the *alazon*, one who pretended to be more than he was (black represented disguise and therefore deception) and managed for a while to destroy the hero. Both main characters were accompanied by a sidekick: the black man by the “impostor,” his alter ego, and the white man by the fool, the trickster. The fool evolved to become the interpreter of the action, the one who would turn to the audience with a complicit wink and comment on or explain a situation.⁴⁷ This figure has never quite disappeared from the scene, but while in farces and *moralités* a lonely *fou* could play the part of critic, in the *sottie* this figure has taken over the white mask of the Xanthos and cloned itself to become a whole series of types and their opposite, actor and commentator, aggressor and victim, leader and follower, to populate a bizarre society in which he fills every rung of the hierarchy. Here the fool conveys his comical message through dialogue, apparently nonsensical but on his plane meaningful, and also acrobatics, that is, incongruous moves.

This type has survived well after the *sottie* as a genre had ceased to be performed. The classic pair *clown blanc-auguste* is well known to audiences of clown shows and has been adapted to mass visual media by famous comic duos, such as Oliver and Hardy or the Smothers Brothers. The *auguste* is the dumb partner, rough and ignorant, usually clad in an ungainly costume (for example, exaggerated shoes and hat, a red nose). His medieval ancestor may have been the *badin* of farces, who appears occasionally in so-called “hybrid” *sotties*.⁴⁸ The white clown is the sophisticated partner, rational but often bad-tempered, who dominates the *auguste* by making him appear ridiculous. His costume is revealing: the face is completely white, sometime with markings that give him a permanently disgusted look, and is dressed in elegant and bizarre outfit that recalls sixteenth-century garb, topped by a conical hat or cap, which, even in the absence of large ears, bears a close resemblance to that of the *sot*. His words, often oozing sarcasm, are designed to connect with the rational aspect of the audience, in other terms, to

⁴⁶ See also the contribution to this volume by John Alexander.

⁴⁷ Holland, *Laughing*, 37–38.

⁴⁸ In hybrid *sotties* the duality is blurred. For example, in “Farce nouvelle tresbonne et fort recreative pour rire des cris de Paris,” Picot, *Recueil Général des Sotties*, 3: 125–48, two *galants* question a *sot*, who acts like a natural fool or *badin*. The *badin* resembles what Freud (*Jokes*, 182) calls the “naïve.”

return him to the archetypal role of interpreter; and (like in some *sotties*) he often accompanies them with music or whimsical acrobatic acts.⁴⁹

Another late reincarnation of the *sot* could be seen in the popular television talk-show host. In fact, the very format of the talk show recalls the *sottie*: a main character is the master of the game (“meneur du jeu”), much like Mère Sotte or the Prince des Sots. He chats with other *sots*, who trickle in by assorted order to interact with him and one another, each contributing his or her special “story” sometimes amusing, sometimes utterly hilarious. As Aubailly has noted, the *sot* may be wise, and the figure of the *sot-sage* is the one that fits the talk-show host the best, while his guests represent the *sots* who may be fooled, or who fool others in nasty ways, while the (allegorical) characters under scrutiny are usually off-stage. In the most successful and long-lived talk shows the tone is satirical but not overly partisan, irreverent but not revolutionary; in other terms, their reputation transcends socio-political contingencies to rest rather on the appealing qualities of the host. This is evident even in places where censorship is not a problem (and this type of show is popular in democracies). It is also apparent that the audiences of this genre are not always sitting on edge waiting for the punch line, but are often content with a pleasant stream of witticisms, an attitude that may well have been shared by those who attended *sotties*.⁵⁰

This brings up the second aspect of the issue, that is, the relation between authors—who, in some cases at least, might have doubled as performers—and their audience. As Holland observes, “what is funny is not simply a result of the comic material but also of the nature of the audience and of the comedian’s personal style.”⁵¹ As to the authors, the *sottie* offers an important clue in that it originated from within a specific professional group, that of law clerks, members of the association called Basoche, which in Paris and perhaps in other cities may have incorporated a troupe of actors among its members.⁵² Harvey sees the hand

⁴⁹ An illustration of the style of this type of clown is found in Federico Fellini’s *The Clowns* (1975). A function of the *sot* that appears in some pieces, like that of the *clown blanc*, may be linked to that of the malcontent or railer. Elliott wonders “whether an obscure association of magic with railing and invective may help to account for the frequency with which the railer-figure appears in literature.” The railer may be made into a scapegoat to drive away evil, and as such he may be partially identified with the fool, even in the absence of cap and bells, which may account for the ambivalence of others toward him as magical protector against evil forces but also as loathsome sacrifice in ancient rites, or a living mascot. Elliott, *Satire*, 134–35, 139.

⁵⁰ Arden (*Fools’ Play*, 59) remarks on the listening ability of medieval audiences.

⁵¹ Holland, *Laughing*, 68.

⁵² Harvey, *The Theatre of the Basoche*, 12, 24. The exact nature of the acting societies and their relation to the associations of law clerks and students is not completely clear. Fabre (*Les Clercs du palais*, 162–63) affirms that the association of young clerks of the *procureurs* of *parlement* (called Basoche in Paris, as in other major cities) had a close relationship with an acting company called the Enfants-Sans-Souci, that was incorporated probably from within its members to write and

of law clerks in the very structure of *sotties*, which recall legal debates and actual trials but also burlesque cases called *causes grasses* that the clerks staged at the time of carnival, and also in their language, “stenographic in reproducing colloquial speech” and evoking “contemporary reports of law court proceedings.”⁵³ What Harvey calls “stenographic” language may be evident in what Aubailly calls “staccato dialogue.” The following is an extreme example of this peculiar style: it shows a group of *sots* engaged in a debate on the envisioned qualities of a new world which they are about to create, and disagreeing on every detail.

Sot dissolu:	Grant.	
Sot glorieux:		Petit.
Sot corrompu:	Gros.	
Sot trompeur:	Pryn.	
Sot ignorant:		Long.
Notte folle:		Puzil.
Sot dissolu:	Menu.	
Sot glorieux:	Douge.	
Sot corrompu:		Comme ung dozilh.
Sot trompeur:	Rond.	
Sot ignorant:	Quarré.	
Notte folle:	Hault.	
Sot dissolu:		Bas.
Sot glorieux:		Estroit.
Sot corrompu:		Large.
Sot trompeur:	Plat.	
Sot ignorant:	Egu.	
Notte folle:	Tort.	
Sot dissolu :		Droit. ⁵⁴

[Big. / Small. / Large. / Thin. / Long. / Short. / Tiny. / Dainty. / Like a spigot. / Round. / Square. / Tall. / Short. / Narrow. / Wide. / Flat. / Pointy. / Crooked. / Straight.]

If indeed there were from eight-thousand to ten-thousand *basochiens* in Paris by the sixteenth century, as estimated by Adolphe Fabre, this was a well-represented group, certainly known to the communities where it operated, not unlike the Italian troupes that became popular in France under Catherine de' Medici, or modern comedy teams like Saturday Night Live and Monty Python, with their own wide and loyal audience (and as in these modern example, except in the rare

perform various types of comedies. The authors of the plays could also come from other associations of law clerks (of the Châtelet, of public notaries, etc.). This relationship lasted until the end of the sixteenth century.

⁵³ Harvey, *The Theatre of the Basoche*, 19–20, 25–27. Fabre, *Les Clercs du palais*, 34, 83–95, 129.

⁵⁴ Picot, “Sotise a huit personnages” lines 565–68 in *Recueil Général des Sotties*, 2: 48–49. Aubailly (*Le Monologue le dialogue et la sottie*, 343–46, 447) refers repeatedly to “staccato” style.

cases in which the author is known, *sotties* seem to have been the product of group efforts).⁵⁵ But what kind of people were these authors and what motivated their production is not too clear. There is an interesting (and lone) study by Seymour and Rhoda Fisher on the personality of the comic, which may help in understanding his relationship with an audience.

They found that the budding comedian comes from a family in which one parent is disapproving and punishing and the other friendly but passive. This contradictory experience pushes the comic toward ambiguous attitudes: ready to criticize or even vent hostility, but eager to conceal it behind a non-threatening mask; self-deprecating but aware of occupying a unique status with special powers, as he manipulates the audience by eliciting laughter on his own terms. Society continues the dual treatment of this figure, "a low-status clown who has priestlike magical powers."⁵⁶ Assuming the likelihood that one's professional environment may also affect personality, or at least social style, it is not farfetched to see at least the potential for this attitude on the part of young law clerks on whom would fall the most mundane tasks and who did not partake of the prestige and the salary reserved to lawyers and judges, but still well-educated and aware of the possibility of success within their professional field.⁵⁷

Harvey, alone among the critics, has argued that the professional bond between playwrights and *parlements* for which they worked was so strong that they would abstain from satirizing their institution.⁵⁸ But his thesis has been refuted by others on the evidence of *sotties* themselves, as in the following example of satirical verses attributed to Sot Corrompu (who, significantly, represents the legal profession):

Sot corrompu:	Procureurs, advocatz ! Procureurs, advocatz! Veu le procès et veu le cas, Tout produict en daniere instance, <i>Probo, nego, cry, parle, quas;</i> Sy faict, non faict, traquin traquas. Procureurs, advocatz ! Procureurs, advocatz! Par nostre arrest briefve sentence Nous disons, sans que homme s'en tence, Que celluy qui plus baille argent
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⁵⁵ Fabre, *Les Clercs du Palais*, xi. The information about Italian troupes is in Harvey, *The Theatre of the Basoche*, 10–11.

⁵⁶ Cited in Holland, *Laughing*, 72–74. Freud (*Jokes*, 142) also suggested that the "joker" may be "a disunited personality, disposed to neurotic disorders," albeit admitting that data is insufficient to formulate a hypothesis.

⁵⁷ Fabre (*Les Clercs du Palais*, xxvi, 256) remarks that the members of the Basoche were bachelors and in general not older than thirty.

⁵⁸ Harvey, *The Theatre of the Basoche*, 176–77, 187–94, 233. His argument is that they satirized only ecclesiastical or feudal courts, not their own *parlements*.

A le droict si cler et se gent.
Appello grates, reffuto après;
 Par final arrest tout exprès;
 Diz: qui a l'or en main tenu
 Soit diffiniment maintenu.⁵⁹

[Prosecutors, attorneys! Prosecutors, attorneys! / In view of the proceedings and in view of the case, / All (evidence) produced in last instance, / *Probo, nego*, announce, talk, quiet; / If done, not done, for this for that. / Prosecutors, attorneys! Prosecutors, attorneys! / By our ruling in short / We declare without admitting objection / That he who pays the most money / Has the right on his side. / *Appello grates*, and then *reffuto*; / And quickly for final deliberation; / I say that who has gold in his hand / Is definitely to be sustained.]

Whatever the target, however, Harvey's comment that the satire itself was "very mild" is harder to refute.⁶⁰ It takes an effort to see in the example just cited a mordant attack on a privileged caste or an invitation to rebellion, in short anything more than a *basochien* having great fun in parodying senior members of his institution to elicit the "rire bonhomme" that Aubailly associates with the farce.⁶¹

Whatever ideas the playwrights expressed and the terms in which they expressed them had to be appreciated by their audiences. However, a positive identification of these audiences has so far eluded researchers. They might have been members of the Basoche itself, as Harvey seems to suggest, or other middle-class urbanites, as Julleville proposes, or still others. Given the scarcity of information the subject continues to be debated, but in any case it is likely that they constituted what Jelle Koopmans calls an "audience of insiders" ("public d'initiés").⁶² The necessity of decoding a text to "get the joke" suggests that the

⁵⁹ Picot, "Sotise a huit personnaiges" lines 175–88 in *Recueil Général des Sotties*, 2:30. Also in the "Sottie des sots fourrés de malice" lines 147–52 in Droz, *Recueil Trepperel*, 83–84, there is a pointed barb directed at *basochiens* based on the equivocal sense of the term *plumerie*.

⁶⁰ Harvey, *The Theatre of the Basoche*, 35.

⁶¹ In the above example it is known that the author André de la Vigne became secretary of Queen Anne of Bretagne, hardly the career of a marginalized rebel. Picot, *Recueil Général des Sotties*, 2: 8–12.

⁶² Jelle Koopmans, *Le Théâtre des exclus*, 17. Harvey (*The Theatre of the Basoche*, 206) does not specifically mention any group outside *basochiens*, but adds that the "audience of preachers and comedians was the same," hence Arden's statement that he sees the *sottie* "as an expression of the Basoche only." Arden, *Fools' Play*, 72. Jean V. Alter, *Les Origines de la satire anti-bourgeoise en France*, 2 vols. (Geneva: Droz, 1966), 1:212, hints that it was a popular audience familiar with the *basochiens*. Julleville (*La Comédie et les mœurs*, 63) is the most specific in identifying an audience of *échevins*, that is, mostly magistrates, and clergy, but not just for *sotties*. See Jelle Koopmans in "Public ou publics? Farces et sotties en France à la fin du Moyen Age," online at: <http://parnaseo.uv.es/Ars/webelx/Pon%C3%A8ncies%20pdf/Koopmans.pdf> (last accessed on Jan. 30, 2010), makes a persuasive argument that it did not constitute an identifiable category of people. He makes indirectly a suggestion as to the age group of these authors, if not of their audience (*Le*

humor of the *sottie* did bind together a particular audience, perhaps young and who was not threatened by irreverence toward authority, and authors who were familiar enough with the authority structure to be able to satirize it. How large an audience did this theater attract? Droz affirms that by the fact that *sotties* were curtain-risers, they were the least important in a typical series of plays.⁶³

However, in the absence of definite data, this statement could be recast as meaning that the *sottie* may have played to a more limited audience, while the mass of spectators opted to be late for it but be on time for the subsequent farces and *moralités*. This view supports the assumption (but does not prove it) that the audience was an engaged intellectual elite, which by definition is a minority.⁶⁴ In fact, though, we do not even know with certainty that *sotties* were liked less, or had only appealed to a few from their inception, but only that they were eventually “swallowed up” by Reformed satire and replaced by the new Italian theater in the late-sixteenth century, while farces continued on and later received a boost with Molière.⁶⁵ This leaves the unsolved enigma of a genre that might have been popular for over a century and then suddenly disappeared. It is not improbable that the cause of this disappearance was caused by the loss of its audience, but what does this tell about the audience itself is matter of speculation. A possible answer may rest with the political environment in which the *sottie* was received. Both Arden and Aubailly touch on this topic, but from different angles. Arden argues that Renaissance society was plagued by a heightened perception of growing inequality. The fracture within the third estate, with the upper bourgeoisie splitting off to form a new aristocracy of money, inspired the bitter satire of the *sottie*, whose authors were, for the most, trapped within its lower strata. Aubailly takes a topological approach: he observes that not only did this genre flourish during and after the Hundred Years War, but also that it was circumscribed to a region of France that experienced an uneven economic boom as a consequence of the war.

This combination, he adds, favored the rise of political consciousness from within the middle class, and with it the valuation of provincial *parlements* and of the Basoches that gravitated around them. It was, he concludes, the war itself, with

Théâtre des exclus, 187) by calling the *basoches* “une espèce de groupement charivarique” for young law clerks and also centers of theatrical production, best known for parodies.

⁶³ Droz, *Recueil Trepperel*, lxxv.

⁶⁴ Julleville (*La Comédie et les mœurs*, 342–43) says that royalty enjoyed farces but is more ambiguous in regard to *sotties*. He mentions (71) Louis XII’s appreciative remarks about the *sottie*, but does not say whether the king ever attend one. The duke of Savoy was apparently expected to attend a performance of the *Sottie des béguins*, but did not. Koopmans, “Public ou publics?,” 7.

⁶⁵ Aubailly, *Le Monologue le dialogue et la sottie*, 441. Julleville, *La Comédie et les mœurs*, 183, 344–45. But Arden (*Fools’ Play*, 43) defends the *sottie*’s lasting popularity.

its devastating effect on authority and economy that spurred this cheeky comedy.⁶⁶ It seems, then, that such light, zany, satirical humor thrives within a certain degree of uncertainty, if not of chaos, when conflicting authorities are vying for supremacy, but the outcome is too fluid to be predictable. In fact Aubailly's statement could be taken further given that the *sottie* did continue to be robust after the end of the Hundred Years War and well into the subsequent conflict between France and Burgundy, the *Guerre Folle*, and the French campaigns in Italy, all initiatives whose wisdom was highly debated. As to why such a genre did not flourish in other countries, for example in England during the contemporary Wars of the Roses, a possible answer is that these conflicts did not affect the population at large as much as the former did in France, and therefore might have failed to produce a "engagé" audience.⁶⁷

But perhaps this label (as used by Aubailly) is too strong because it seems to imply that the *sottie* carried an implicit reformist agenda in step with an activist audience. A better fitting tag could be "aware," that is, up-to-date on political and social events, irreverent, often cynical (because looking skeptically at both sides of issues), but not committed to any specific program.⁶⁸ Rather, these pieces show the comic above the fray, mocking human behavior in general. Most critics have been frustrated in their attempts to date them because of their scant and oblique references to real events, and assumed that fear of censorship prompted these evasive maneuvers. However, if the object of the play is to elicit laughter this would not do, because then a logical layer would be added between incongruity and resolution of the same, which, as psychologist found out, kills the humor. On the other hand, if humor has to have "salience content" then it is just as unlikely that references to real events were scant because those events were not all that important to the message of the *sotties*, as suggested by Droz.⁶⁹

It seems more likely that vague allusions that escape a modern reader were understood perfectly well by contemporary audiences and that the veiled language itself was part of the comic delivery, as it motivated the resolution of the

⁶⁶ Aubailly, *Le Monologue le dialogue et la sottie*, 463; Arden, *Fools' Play*, 75, 132–34. See also Fabre, *Les Clercs du palais*, xxvi.

⁶⁷ John Gillingham, *The Wars of the Roses: peace and conflict in fifteenth-century England* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981), 11. In his opening chapter he argues against an exaggeratedly dark view of the fifteenth century and of the Wars of the Roses in particular. Fabre (*Les Clercs du palais*, 134) talks about the state of lawlessness and the rampant abuses during the civil wars.

⁶⁸ This is more consonant with Arden's remarks (*Fools' Play*, 138–41) on how the message of the *sottie* was conservative, respectful of hierarchies and institutions, and only critical of violations of "natural" social order.

⁶⁹ She remarks that the *sots* seem interested only in the price of bread and wine, usurers and local scandals, and not politics, hence the passing mentions of historical events. Droz, *Recueil Trepperel*, lxx.

incongruity. So the very quality of ambiguity that frustrates critics may be the reason for plays having endured to make their way into the various collections (endured, that is, so long as the subject matter carried salience). It is paradoxical that this playful style gives way to a much more focused and coherent political satire in what may well be the most famous of *sotties*, Pierre Gringore's "Jeu du Prince des Sots" (1512). This piece, which attacks Pope Julius II and his anti-French policies in a partisan tone that anticipates the virulent anti-papal satire of the next generation, has other anomalies: for example, a vast cast of characters, (eighteen between *sots* and other symbolic figures representing various high-ranking church members, while most other *sotties* have between three and eight), and a more complex versification than the traditional octosyllabic verse.⁷⁰ The fact that this play was apparently liked by Gringore's audience and those after him who saw it worthy of being preserved suggests that what appears as "degeneration" of the genre into state-sponsored propaganda may have been a consequence of the more partisan tone of political discourse as the sixteenth century advanced and new issues came to the fore with new attitudes in dealing with them. As Koopmans maintains, the audience itself had changed over time, forcing change in the tone and style of satire.⁷¹

Along this line, Anton Zijderveld discourages readers from over-emphasizing the safety-valve explanation for the reception of humor by medieval audiences. He argues that there was a "widespread restlessness" about medieval society which should not be interpreted as feelings of repression that demanded an outlet. For such a feeling to exist there must exist a "clear images of an alternative socio-economic and political structure, and there must be a real chance for their historical realization." Therefore it only spread after the bourgeoisies had acquired wealth and power while still being kept in bondage by absolutist monarchies in later times.⁷² As a parallel, it is curious that some of the most successful modern shows whose madcap humor can be compared to that of the *sottie*, in that it

⁷⁰ Picot, "Sottie contre le pape Jules II" in *Recueil Général des Sotties*, 2: 131–73. Droz (*Recueil Trepperel*, lxx) noticed the unusual political tone of Gringore's plays (beside the cited one, also "Sotye nouvelle des chroniqueurs," Picot, *Recueil Général des Sotties*, 2: 213–43), which she considers later than those of the Trepperel collection. For a discussion on the unusual versification of this piece see Taku Kuroiwa, "Stratégie satirique dans les sotties imprimées: le cas de l'utilisation des octosyllabes à rimes plates," *Le Théâtre polémique*, ed. Bouhaïk-Gironès, Koopmans and Lavéant, 53–54. The fact that an anomalous piece has become the best known representative of its genre is not too unusual, if one thinks of the odd fate of the *Farce de maître Pathelin*, the most celebrated of farces of this period, but also the least characteristic. Koopmans, "Public ou publics?," 3.

⁷¹ Koopmans, "Public ou publics?," 3.

⁷² Zijderveld, *Reality in a Looking-Glass*, 44, 90. Significantly, he also traces only as far back as early modern times the habit of keeping a permanent court jester, as if harnessing folly to become an instrument of absolutism.

satirized all without taking a definite position, came about in the 1970s, from within a generation born while the long and indecisive Cold War had been ongoing and already showing signs of weariness, while in the following decade the tone of satire took on a more polemical tone.

Finally, the last aspect of the issue is how the humor was delivered. Morreal lists a series of modern, in fact timeless, comic techniques that seem to have been followed in great part by the authors of *sotties*. Beside the obvious use of puns or Pig Latin, he includes also partial (but not total) violation of logical principles, that is, uttering expressions just coherent enough to sound plausible, such as overstatements, understatement, or sarcasm, all accompanied by facial expressions that do not match the semantic content. The comic—he advises—has to engage the attention of the audience and thus have some control over its train of thought; he should not try to make everything funny, but rather “maintain an atmosphere in which the audience’s sense of reality is preserved;” and he should maintain originality and freshness to catch the audience off-guard.⁷³ One method widely used for this purpose in modern stand-up-comedy is that of calling some spectators to participate, and this is precisely what happens in the “*Sottie des béguins*,” when in the middle of the play members of the audience are invoked by name, and a clerk among them is charged with composing a letter to the (fictitious) Bon Temps, thus immersing reality into fantasy.⁷⁴ Another, requiring particular bravura on the part of the writers and actors, is what is commonly known as “talking heads.” In modern spoofs this practice is typically realized as a parody of an actual profession, that of newscaster and television commentator, one which finds a medieval equivalent in the astrologer of the “*Sottie de l’astrologue*” (1499?) where the main character discusses the affairs of contemporary figures in a pedantic jargon, ostensibly talking of planets and stars:

L’Astrologue : Par Dieu, je n’y sçay que songer;
 Point n’y vois bone qualité.
 Puis que *Virgo* en est osté
 Et que Justice in *Cancro* dance,
Gemini a auctorité,
 Je n’y prens point bonne esperance.⁷⁵

⁷³ Morreal, *Taking Laughter Seriously*, 70–84.

⁷⁴ Picot, “*Sottie des béguins*, jouée a Geneve en la place du Molard, la dimanche des bordes, l’an 1523,” *Recueil Général des Sotties*, 2: 282–83.

⁷⁵ Picot, “*Sottie nouvelle de l’astrologue*” lines 182–87 in *Recueil Général des Sotties*, 1: 212. As for the dating of the piece Picot thinks that it was written in 1498, but Jelle Koopmans (“Polémiques universitaires sur la scène,” *Le Théâtre polémique*, ed. Bouhaïk-Gironès, Koopmans and Lavéant, 81) moves it to 1499, based on references to the two queens and the opposition to the new marriage of Louis XII on the part of the University. An entire *sottie*, the “*Farce nouvelle des esbahis à quatre personnages*” in Cohen, *Recueil de farces françaises*, 21–24, is structured around an

[By God, I don't know what to think; / I don't see any good. / Since Virgo (Jeanne of France, divorced by Louis XII to marry Anne of Bretagne) has been kicked out / And Justice dances in Cancer (backwards), / (and) Gemini is in control, (the Amboise brothers, favorites of Louis XII) / I have no good hope.]

In a variant, the parody may target a type and not a professional group: in the "Sottie des sots qui corrigent le Magnificat" two equally pompous and useless characters exchange pleasantries while indulging in criticism of various people to the disgust of three *sots*. The comic effect derives from the incongruity of the lofty enunciations vis-à-vis the silliness of their content, as when the two characters discuss in all seriousness their absurd lines of business:

Dando:	Or ça maintenant. Comptez moy [...] de vostre estat?
Maistre Aliborum:	Mon estat?
Dando:	Voire.
Maistre Aliborum:	Pour le present Je corrige magnificat. Et vous, quoy ?
Dando:	Je prens mon esbat. Nous chantons tous deux a ung ton, Vous corrigez et chien et chat, Je juis <i>domine fac totum</i> .
Maistre Aliborum:	Comment?
Dando:	Je ferre cest oyson.
Maistre Aliborum:	Des oyres ferrier vous meslez vous?
Dando:	Ouy, c'est toute ma lectzon. ⁷⁶

[So now, tell me about your situation? / My situation? / Right / At this time I correct the Magnificat (proverbial expression that means correcting something without knowing anything about it) / And you? I am relaxing. / We are birds of a feather: you improve dogs and cats / (and) I am a domine factotum. / How? / I shoe this goose. (proverbial expression that means doing something useless) / So you are into shoeing geese? / Yes, that is my entire expertise.]

The *sottie* is so closely associated with another comic technique, verbal leaps from one subject to another totally unrelated (sometimes called *coq-à-l'âne*), that Picot believed it to be the defining characteristic of the entire genre.⁷⁷ An example of this

exchange and interpretation of news, some contemporary and some old (in fact, related to mythological characters).

⁷⁶ Droz, "Sottie des sots qui corrigent le Magnificat a cinq personages," lines 181–91 in *Recueil Trepperel*, 200.

⁷⁷ Dull (*Folie et rhétorique*, 74) defines the technique as the juxtaposition of unrelated concepts and images in verses that appear logical but that are in reality a jump from one topic to another

bizarre, nonsensical dialogue is in “Menus propos,” where two *sots* converse in disjointed couplets that make sense syntactically, but not as elements of a dialogue:

Le Premier: Petite pluie abat grant vent
 Et si fait saulver mainte barge.
 Le Second: J’ay la conscience aussi large
 Que les housseaux d’un Escossais.
 Le Tiers : Je ne dy pas ce que je sçais;
 Je suis ung tresbon secretaire,
 Et si sçarois le secret taire,
 Aussi bien, par Dieu, que une femme.⁷⁸

[A small rain calms a strong wind / And thus saves many a boat. / I have a conscience as big / As the hose of a Scotsman. / I do not say what I know; / I am an excellent secretary, / And I know how to keep a secret, / As well, by God, as a woman.]

Another example, taken from the opening lines of the “Cris de Paris,” may actually satirize the jargon of real-life fops (*galants*) and relies heavily on puns in its flights of fancy:

Le Premier Gallant: Et puis?
 Le Second: Et fontaine?
 Le Premier: Et rivières.
 Se sont tousjours de tes manieres:
 Tu te gaudis.
 Le Second: Je me gaudis
 Et en povreté m’esbaudis
 En passant ma melencolie.
 Le Premier: Melencolie n’est que follie.
 Le Second: Jamais charger ne t’en convient.
 Comment te va ?
 Le Premier: Comme il me vient.
 Le Second: Comment te vient ?
 Le Premier: Comme il me va.
 Le Second: Jamais gallant mieulx ne resva.
 Feras tu tousjours le mauvais ?
 Comment te va ?
 Le Premier: Comme je voys.

without any meaningful connection (“du coq-à-l’âne”). Because of its characteristic dialogue Picot (*Recueil Général des Sotties*, 1: iv–vi) believed that the *sottie* derived from the *fatrasie*. But Julleville (*La Comédie et les mœurs*, 69) recognized it as just one of the many comic techniques employed by the *sottie*, and his opinion has prevailed.

⁷⁸ Picot, “Les menus propos,” lines 255–62 in *Recueil Général des Sotties*, 1: 87. But, as Aubailly noticed (*Le Monologue le dialogue et la sottie*, 318), among the apparently silly statements the *sots* slip satirical quips under the cover of feigned folly.

Le Second : Comment vas tu ?
 Le Premier: Comme je peulx.
 Le Second: Comment peulx tu ?
 Le Premier: Comme je suis.
 Le Second: Comment es tu ?
 Le Premier: Comme j'estoye.
 Le Second: Comment estoys tu ?
 Le Premier: Comme souloys.⁷⁹

[And then? (pun on "well") / And fountain? / And rivers. / They are always as you wish them. / You are happy. / I am happy / And in poverty I amuse myself / While chasing away my melancholy. / Melancholy is nothing but folly. / You should never burden yourself with it. / How goes it? As it comes. / How comes it ? As it goes. / Never a fop has dreamt better. / Will you always be bad? / How goes it for you? / As I go. / How do you go? (fare) / As I can. / How can you? / As I am. / How are you? / As I was. / How were you? / As usual.]

At times the verbal pirouettes verge on literary comedy, as when a couple of naive *gorriers* (*sots, galants*) in the "Folie des gorriers" court Folie in flowery terms as if she were a real-life noble lady:

Le Premier : Fleur de beaulté, ma seulle souffissance,
 Souffisante sur toutes les viventes,
 Vivant soulds au millieu des plaisantes,
 Plaisir me croist quant vous voy, sans doubance.
 Doubte n'ay point, tant ay grande fience,
 Fient de vous ou j'ay mis mes attentes,
 Fleur de beaulté.
 La peur que j'ay, c'est qu'envers vous offence.
 Offenser, las, ce sont choses dolentes;
 Doulent seroit mon cueur en toutes sentes;
 Sentez pour brief morir de desplaisance,
 Fleur de beaulté.⁸⁰

[Flower of beauty, my only sustenance, / Sufficient above all living, / Living solace among pleasures, / Pleasure seizes me when I see you, without doubt. / Doubt is absent, given that I have such trust, / Trusting in you in whom I have placed my hopes, / Flower of beauty. / The fear I have is that I give you offence. / To offend, alas, is sad. / Sad would be my heart in all senses; / Feel (me) in short die of grief, / Flower of beauty.]

⁷⁹ Picot, "Farce nouvelle tresbonne et fort recreative pour rire des cris de Paris," lines 1–16 in *Recueil Général des Sotties*, 3: 125–26.

⁸⁰ Picot, "Farce nouvelle nommee la Folie des gorriers a .iiii. personnages," lines 176–87 in *Recueil Général des Sotties*, 1: 152–53.

Some *sotties* revolve around what might be called an action-based variant of this technique, which at times consists of acting out of a proverbial expression (in itself without any relation to the drama) or the proposal of a game (“jeu”) from *sots* themselves or their superiors at any stage of the performance.⁸¹ For example, in the “*Sottie des sots triomphants qui trompent chascun*” two *sots* force a wary Chascun to follow their lead into silly games unrelated to the previous action:

Fine Mine:	Chascun ?
Chascun:	Quoy ?
Fine Mine:	Fais ainsky: hun [hun].
Chacun:	Hun.
Fine Mine:	La mort, tombons en arriere.
Teste Verte:	Chascun faict en ceste maniere Le grant et aussi le petit.
Sottie:	Les sotz font devant et derriere De Chascun a leur appetit.
Fine Mine:	Chascun !
Chacun:	Hon !
Fine Mine:	Regarde ung petit, Ryons tous ensemble : hy !
Teste Verte:	Hy !
Fine Mine:	Pleurons tous ensemble.
Chacun:	Hon.
Fine Mine:	Chantons. ⁸²

[Everyone? / What? / Do this: hun (hun) / Hun. / Death, let's fall backwards. / Everyone does this, both the great and the small. / The sots do front and back / As they please, of Everyone. / Everyone! What? / Look here a moment, / Let's laugh all together: hy! / Hy! / Let's all cry. / Ho. / Let's sing.]

The “*Sottie des galans et du Monde*” is an example of what Aubailly calls “sottie-action” that finds a brilliant modern parallel in the famous Monty Python sketch of the hapless pet shop salesman who, forced to concede that he had sold a dead parrot, escapes embarrassment by leaping to the forests of Canada, only to become an equally unsuccessful lumberjack. The play opens with a dialogue between three *galants* (*sots*) who debate how to leave home and go and live with Monde. But as soon as the new character of Monde is introduced (in the role of “straight man”) the action turns into a series of pranks at his expenses, ranging from annoying to

⁸¹ An example of the first is in the “*Sottie des sots qui corrigent le Magnificat a cinq personages*,” line 358 in Droz, *Recueil Trepperel*, 210, where the *sots* place a bit in the mouth of gossips. (literally interpreting the expression “mettre le frein aux dents”) while the central theme is the proverbial correction of the Magnificat.

⁸² Droz, “*Sottie des sots triomphants qui trompent chascun*,” lines 175–83 in *Recueil Trepperel*, 43.

nasty, and the dialogue turns to clever sparring (recalling the salesman who insists against all evidence that the parrot is not dead).

The comic effect is supplied by the *sots'* verbal jabs at Monde to his growing annoyance, to culminate in outright exasperation (a situation experienced by the disaffected customer in the pet store). The *sots* behave mischievously without any apparent reason, and attack Monde from every side (literally interpreting a figure of speech) with an intensity that is incongruous when measured against their apparent lack of purpose. Like the pet store salesman, they wiggle free when the game backfires.⁸³ This example brings up one of the keystones of Aubailly's thesis, that the dissenting element is central to the structure of the *sottie*. In fact, it is especially evident in its humor, facilitated as it is by freedom from the constraints of a logical plot and from any semblance of realism.

The one comic technique that is not much exploited in *sotties* is the exploit of obscenity or scurrilous language, at least not as commonly as in farces. Among modern critics Droz appears to disagree with this view, as she bring attention to the obscene nature of a scene in the "Sottie des sots fourrés de malice," when Chose Publique (the *Res Publica*) appears on stage in a miserable state and dressed like a prostitute. Here she laments of mistreatment on the hands of members of the previous administration (Droz dates the play to the opening of the reign of Charles VIII), and the captain of the *sots* nobly commands his followers to re-examine her to set her right:

Le Cappitaine:	A l'envers, a l'endroit, Et par tout, tort ou droict, Revisitez la bien.
L'Affineur:	Quant le cueur luy fauldroit, J'ay ce qu'il luy fauldroit Et luy feroit grant bien.
Fine Mine:	J'en feray si tresbien Que je scauray combien De bien en son corps entre.
Perroquet :	Se seul a seul la tien Aussi scauray je bien, Par Dieu, qu'elle a ou ventre. ⁸⁴

⁸³ Aubailly, *Le Monologue le dialogue*, 321. This is a category of *sottie* that has a more substantial plot than others. The example is the "Farce joyeuse a cinq personnages des galans et du monde," in Picot, *Recueil Général des Sotties*, 1:15–46.

⁸⁴ Droz, "Sottie des sots fourrés de malice," lines 369–80 in *Recueil Trepperel*, 90–91. Droz's comments are at p. 73. Aubailly (*Le Monologue le dialogue et la sottie*, 449–50) notes that, like the farce, the *sottie* resorts to double-entendre. But Julleville (*La Comédie et les mœurs*, 11–12) defends even the farce from charges of obscenity.

[From the back, from the front, / Everywhere, skewed or right, / Revisit her well. / When her courage fails her, / I have just what she needs / And will do her lots of good. / I will take care of it so well / That I will know how much / Good will get into her body. / If I have her alone / Then I will know well, / By God what she has in her belly.]

Despite the language used, however, this exchange seems devoid of erotic content.⁸⁵ It is obvious that the *sots* are cheerfully taking the task of examining her from front and back and ensure that some good will enter her quite literally and that the end of the play is a cynical comment on the intentions of political figures (even as the captain's own intentions are hard to guess). The audience is not expected to pity the allegorical figure as if she were a real person, but rather to laugh in resolving the incongruity based on the fact that "she" is not a person, but an abstraction treated like a real being. If this were a farce, she would be a female "type," and the comic effect would be based on her reaction, either willing participation or indignation (with the audience enlisted as knowing accomplice of one party or the other). But in the *sottie* the audience is let in the knowledge that the authors are talking politics, not sex. Likewise, obscene puns are relatively rare in *sotties* and their appearance seems to be due less to a taste for this specific form of humor than to the habit (otherwise shared by modern playwrights) of slipping crude expressions almost unnoticed into everyday speech. Thus, in the "*Sottie des sots qui remittent Bon Temps*" Socte Myne and Teste Ligiere open the play with an exchange of witty but obscene puns about lovemaking, an exchange that has nothing to do with the rest of the play and only amounts to twenty verses out of a total of three-hundred-forty-seven.⁸⁶

Most critics date the demise of the *sottie* to the late sixteenth century: apparently by the 1570s or 1580s it disappeared altogether, to be replaced by the newly-introduced Italian theater and having first undergone a metamorphosis toward a "bastard form" based on the burlesque and inoffensive humor of the farce.⁸⁷ According to Droz it continued on by transforming part of its repertoire into literature thanks to Rabelais, while Julleville sees it giving way to a new "political comedy."⁸⁸ This fading away into separate paths renders even more problematic

⁸⁵ Assuming that this is the meaning of Droz's statement. For in-depth observations on the topic see Albrecht Classen, "Sexual Desire and Pornography: Literary Imagination in a Satirical Context. Gender Conflict, Sexual Identity, and Misogyny in 'Das Nonnenturnier,'" *Sexuality in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Times: New Approaches to a Fundamental Cultural-Historical and Literary-Anthropological Theme*, ed. Albrecht Classen. Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture, 3 (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 649–90.

⁸⁶ Droz, "Sottie des sots qui remettent en point Bon Temps" 42: 64 in *Recueil Trepperel*, 264–65.

⁸⁷ Aubailly, *Le Monologue le dialogue et la sottie*, 342. Picot (*Recueil Général des Sotties*, 1:xxi) reports that it continued to be performed in some form into the early seventeenth century. See also Arden, *Fools' Play*, 14.

⁸⁸ Droz, *Recueil Trepperel*, lxxi. Julleville, *La Comédie et les mœurs*, 3–4.

the evaluation of its success, because its evolution could be a sign of viability rather than of failure. I see in its humor a major contributing factor to its viability. What makes the *sottie* funny was its zaniness: it was an irreverent, at times silly, mischievous show that created a surreal world made up of distorted bits of reality, with a “made as you go” quality that suggests that the students and young clerks who authored it had a great time in testing on each other the effects of their gambadoes and puns. In it each staged scene brought a surprise, which kept the audience guessing from which direction the next one would come, and in effect prevented it from building expectations.

The very absence of plot allowed this genre the freedom to tap techniques ranging from slapstick to satire that gave it its comical edge. Its message was delivered by the fool, a comic type that has a long history in the performing arts and has shown a remarkable resilience through modern times; it was directed at a specific audience who was receptive to it, but it also seems to appeal to an undercurrent of impishness and folly that may re-emerge when given a favorable cultural settings; and was planned along well-understood rules designed to elicit a laughter that was not particularly aggressive or exclusively based on satirical attacks.⁸⁹ This elusive, unsettling humor, which is not appreciated by all, medieval or modern, is in itself a defining point for the genre. Unfortunately, however, its full effect comes from the recognition of clues that only too often escape an audience unfamiliar with its environment, and therefore it earns the appreciation of alien readers only partially, and through the tortuous path of decoding its cryptic form and sometime obsolete content.

⁸⁹ Doudet (“Statut et figures de la voix satirique”, 16) quotes Jean Bouchet (“Epistre XIII” in *Epistres Morales et Familieres*) in which he equates French satire with *sottie* (“On dit Satyre estre une chose malle; / En France elle a de la sotie le nom.”), but I am referring to its form of humor exclusively. As for the resilience of folly as cultural phenomenon, Zijderveld (*Reality in a Looking-Glass*, 129) affirms that the intellectualization of the Reformation destroyed it (temporarily), but it resurrected with the Dadaists of the 1920s and the Hippies of the 1960s.

Chapter 23

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Sacred Parody in Robert Greene's *Groatworth of Wit* (1592)

Bakhtin's critical category 'sacred parody' is not only useful in identifying comic subtexts in early modern literature, his analysis of sacred parody, in general, also helps to contextualize this particular comic element within a Protestant literary tradition of comedy as polemic. Although Mark Burde's thought-provoking contribution to this volume suggests the term 'sacred parody' has often been misapplied as a catchall category, especially when taken out of its very specific historical context,¹ nevertheless, Bakhtin's concept of sacred parody as an aspect of carnivalesque literature remains irrefutably applicable in the right context and will be quite useful for our interpretive approach. The applicability of sacred parody to the rich Reformation context of Elizabethan pamphlets is undeniable.² In fact, sacred parody is often overlooked in Reformation comedy, which results in the loss of a fully critical understanding of such texts. Missing the sacred parody in Robert Greene's pamphlet *Groatworth of Wit* (1592), for example, has led to some rather naïve misreadings. Greene's multiple burlesques of Puritan deathbed conversion, of which *Groatworth* is one, are often misconstrued as sincere dying repentances.³ The fact that Greene uses sacred parody to stage his resurrection by

¹ Indeed, Burde claims that sacred parody may not ever have been a distinct genre, and Bakhtin may have been anachronistic when applying it as a critical category.

² Robert Hornback, *The English Clown Tradition from the Middle Ages to Shakespeare*. Studies in Renaissance Literature, 26 (Woodbridge, Suffolk, and New York: D. S. Brewer, 2009). Robert Hornback's analysis of the dramatization of misrule, in the Edwardian period, reveals that Protestants incorporated the carnivalesque parody of Catholic ritual, "as a means of inculcating Reformation" (66) in this period and that a revival of this tradition was evident in the anti-Puritan polemics of the Elizabethan period, especially among those writers (such as Robert Greene) who wrote in opposition to the Marprelate Tracts (96–97).

³ Henrie Chettle, *Kind-Hartes Dreame* (1592), *Elizabethan and Jacobean Quartos*, ed., G. B. Harrison

writing multiple mock dying repentance pamphlets is lost on readers unaware of the tradition of sacred parody, especially as polemic, causing many to miss the point of *Groatsworth* entirely. Greene's *Groatsworth* mocks deathbed conversions in order to recover the Christian understanding of a boundaryless, changing, grotesque self as exemplary, indeed, Christ-like and to lampoon a hypocritical antitheatrical Puritan ideology.

According to Bakhtin, sacred parody grew out of a medieval Christian festive tradition in Europe.⁴ It involved a parody of "entire Scripture" and of "litanies, hymns, psalms, [and] even Gospel sayings" and, in its more generalized form, it became part of the larger carnivalesque literature of parody, which "was permitted to turn the direct sacred word into a parodic-travestying mask; it could be born again, as it were, out of the grave of authoritative and reverential seriousness."⁵ In Greene's sacred parody, the gospel, psalms, and *ars moriendi* become a mask through which he mocks the authoritative seriousness of a newly emergent antitheatrical Puritan piety that based its righteousness on a "'true' unchanging identity"⁶ Greene, a champion of moderate Protestantism, had frequently satirized Puritans. He lampooned Martin Marprelate, the *nom de guerre* of various Puritans attacking the prelacy in print, and his writing of the *Spanish Masquerado*, a masque drawn from Carnivals in the time of "Lorenzo the Magnificent,"⁷ together with his *Oration or Funeral Sermon* are of the genre that Stephen Hillard attributes with "a skillful appeal to national sentiments," which attempted to "discredit the aspirations of Puritans."⁸

Indeed, Greene defends the culture of Carnival against an onslaught of anti-Carnival prejudice by writing *Groatsworth* as a defense of theater in the tradition of sacred parody. Antitheatricalists condemned the dramatic arts as sinful, linking carnivalesque drama to a Roman and, thereby, a Catholic tradition. Stephen Gosson complains of the indecency of mystery plays and pageants that Rome introduced to London, claiming, "Compare London to Rome and England to Italy, you shall finde the theater of the one, the abuses of the other, to be rife among

(1922; New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1966). When Greene died, he left, as Henrie Chettle writes, "many papers in sundry Booke sellers hands" (5) out of which were later published three repentance pamphlets: *Greene's Vision*, *Groatsworth of Wit*, and *The Repentance of Robert Greene*.

⁴ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (1965; Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1984), 13–14.

⁵ Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (1975; Austin: University of Texas, 1981), 74.

⁶ Jean Howard, *The Stage and Social Struggle in Early Modern England* (New York and London: Routledge, 1994), 44.

⁷ Anthony Esler, "Robert Greene and the Spanish Armada," *English Literary History* 32.3 (Sept. 1965): 314–32; here 317.

⁸ Stephen S. Hillard, *The Singularity of Thomas Nashe* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 33.

us."⁹ However, Greene's use of Carnival does not just imitate Carnavalesque pageants and plays in general but it also mimics the sacred parody within Carnival that facilitated criticism of the clergy and even the Pope, suggesting the importance of Carnival to the dramatic tradition of Protestantism rather than Catholicism. E. K. Chamber's claims that before the "Act for the advancement of true Religion in 1543," which, pointedly, only occurred after the Protestant reformer Thomas Cromwell had fallen, "in every inn-yard and on every village green, the praises of the pure Gospel were sung, and Pope and priests were derided in play, at the bidding of the wily Privy Seal." What accounted for the change in attitude toward the theater, according to Chamber's was "the substitution of a Calvinist for a Lutheran bias in the conduct of the Reformation."¹⁰

Before this Puritanical hostility toward the carnivalesque occurred, reformers championed the freedom from institutional authority which sacred parody allowed, even cultivated, in its audience. Carnival contributed to the questioning of orthodoxy that would fuel the Reformation. Luther himself drew on the writings of Boccaccio.¹¹ In France, the style of Rabelais was adopted by "Protestant polemicists" not only in their satire but also in their "theoretical works."¹² Even the French translation of the Bible, by John Calvin's cousin Pierre Olivetan, was written in the "style of Rabelais."¹³ As Werner Röcke and Hans Rudolf Velten observe, "Laughing communities can decide on social exclusion or inclusion, reputation or contempt. They can establish power positions, but they also facilitate transgressions . . ."¹⁴ The communities that formed around carnivalesque laughter would eventually exclude the very Church that enabled Carnival.

In England, early reformers such as John Bale, Nicholas Udall, and John Skelton wrote innovative religious drama that relied upon carnivalesque conventions of inversion, grotesquery, and sacred parody in order to challenge the orthodoxy of

⁹ Stephen Gosson, *The School of Abuse: Containing a Pleasant Invective Against Poets, Pipers, Players, Jesters, & Company* (1841; London: Elibron Classics, 2005), 24.

¹⁰ E. K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, 4 vols. (1923; Oxford, London, et al.: The Clarendon Press, 1945), 1:242.

¹¹ Florence Nightengale Jonas, *Boccaccio and His Imitators in German, English, French, Spanish, and Italian: The Decameron* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1910), 2. Giovanni Boccaccio, *Decameron*, ed., trans., and introduced by J. G. Nichols (1930; New York, London, and Toronto: Oneworld Classics, 2008). Martin Luther, *The Table Talk of Martin Luther*, ed. and trans. William Hazlitt (London: George Bell and Sons, 1902). In *the Decameron*, Boccaccio tells a tale wherein, "Abraham, a Jew visits the papal court in Rome. When he sees the wickedness of the clergy, he returns to Paris and becomes a Christian" (Hazlitt, 33). Luther tells a similar tale in *Table Talk*: "The Jew went to Rome, and when he had sufficiently seen the abominations acted there, he returned . . . desiring to be baptized . . ." (Hazlitt, 353).

¹² Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, 60, 99.

¹³ Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, 101.

¹⁴ Quoted from Albrecht Classen's Introduction to this volume, 4.

religious tradition and the power of churchmen.¹⁵ However, more precise Protestants, or 'Precisions' as Puritans were first called, would not tolerate the lawless ideology that accompanied the carnivalesque, its power to question moral authority and to mock the overly pious. Paul White argues that, whereas in the early part of Elizabeth's reign there had been an "alliance between drama and Protestantism," by the last few decades of the sixteenth century, there would be a "Protestant opposition to playing."¹⁶

This opposition is most strongly represented by the antitheatrical writing of Stephen Gosson and Philip Stubbes. Paul White notes that, according to Stubbes, Elizabethans who had "serious religious scruples" found even "biblical plays . . . domestic tragedies and the Protestant saint plays . . . deeply offensive."¹⁷ The decade in which Greene published *Groatsworth*, the 1590s, Patrick Collinson refers to as the "nasty nineties."¹⁸ It was a decade that not only launched the formal English satire but, according to Collinson, it was a decade marked by an increase in polemical writing between Anglicans and Puritans, so much so that the decade ended with "the archbishop . . . utterly forbidding the printing of 'satires' . . ."¹⁹

However, well before the edict was in place, in 1592, Greene wrote *Groatsworth of Wit*, in opposition to this Puritan assault on the stage. *Groatsworth of Wit* deliberately draws upon the tradition of sacred parody; it lampoons the overly pious antitheatrical Puritan writing of Stephen Gosson and Philip Stubbes, the two most notorious writers against the stage.

Nevertheless, most critics have read Robert Greene's late mock repentant pamphlets, of which *Groatsworth* is one, as evidence of Greene's deathbed religious conversion and final repentances.²⁰ Referring specifically to *Groatsworth*, the editor

¹⁵ For an example of Bale's and Udall's use of Carnival, see Robert Hornback, "Reassessing *Gammer Gurton's Needle*: Reformation Satire, Scatology, and the Aesthetics of Iconoclasm," *The Blackwell Companion to Tudor Literature and Culture, 1485–1603*, ed. Kent Cartwright (forthcoming, 2010); For an example of Carnival in the writing of Skelton, see Charles Clay Doyle, "Lenten Fare and the Language of Falsehood: Pig and Pike, Fish and Fowl," *Albion* 10 (1978): 27–34.

¹⁶ Paul Whitfield White, *Theatre and Reformation: Protestantism, Patronage, and Playing in Tudor England* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 174.

¹⁷ Paul White, *Theater and Reformation*, 163, 166.

¹⁸ Patrick Collinson, "Ecclesiastical Vitriol: Religious Satire in the 1590s and the Invention of Puritanism," *The Reign of Elizabeth I: Court and Culture in the Last Decade*, ed. John Guy (Cambridge, New York, Oakleigh: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 150–171; here 170.

¹⁹ Patrick Collinson, "Ecclesiastical Vitriol," 153.

²⁰ The few critics who do not read Greene's final repentance pamphlets as autobiography are too cautious to argue that they are total farces, at best they suggest partial insincerity or dwell upon aspects of the work that call Greene's sincerity into question. See, for example, Lori Newcomb, *Reading Popular Romance in Early Modern England* (New York, Chichester, West Sussex: Columbia University Press, 2002); Newcomb, "A Looking Glass for Readers: Cheap Print and Senses of Repentance," *Writing Robert Greene*, ed. Kirk Melnikoff and Edward Gieskes (Aldershot, Hants, England, and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008), 133–57; Alexandra Halasz, *The Marketplace of Print:*

of the only complete collection of Greene's work writes, "sincerity and reality pulsate in every word of these ultimate utterances."²¹ Lawrence Manley adds that "an apparently genuine dissipation became the basis for a protracted literary repentance" and that "Greene's works moved . . . from retraction to (apparently) frank autobiography."²² Even in the most recent criticism of Greene's late repentant pamphlets, "A Looking Glass for Readers: Cheap Print and Senses of Repentance" (though *Groatsworth* is attributed to Henry Chettle), Lori Newcomb defends Greene against the charge of insincerity, which the multiple nature of his late repentances suggest, by arguing that "period theology counseled that any believer's struggle to repent would be lifelong" (134). The insincerity in Greene's repentances, however, is evident not only in the number of times he repents but in the irony, contradiction, and allusions suggestive of parody that accompany all his repentances.

As Anita Obermeier reveals, repentances, like Greene's, even "alleged deathbed conversions," could represent not "unilateral moral and personal statements" but "literary expressions."²³ Even as early as the Middle Ages, the apology had become a literary tradition, "allowing authors to manipulate their self-critical strategies to various auctorial ends" (22). Moreover, Ovid and Chaucer, who, as Obermeier reveals, wrote in this tradition, influenced Greene's writing. In fact, Greene discusses both Chaucer and Ovid's influence in *Greene's Vision*, which was one of the late repentance pamphlets published together with Greene's *Groatworth* in 1592. Jeremy Dimmick argues that Greene is a "covert Ovidian" and that Chaucer represents "Greene's past authorial practice" that Greene repudiates while emulating in *Greene's Vision*. According to Dimmick, "Greene replays the basic structure of *The Book of the Duchess* . . . with variations in Chaucer's . . . early dream

Pamphlets and the Public Sphere in Early Modern England (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997). Both Newcomb and Halasz imply Greene's insincerity by discussing his monetary interest as motivation; See Steve Mentz, "Forming Greene: Theorizing the Early Modern Author in the *Groatsworth of Wit*," *Writing Robert Greene*, ed. Kirk Melnikoff and Edward Gieskes (Aldershot, Hants, England, and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008), 115–33. Mentz reads Greene's *Groatsworth* as a survey of Green's own literary career written as apology; Jeremy Dimmick, "Gower, Chaucer, and the art of Repentance," *The Review of English Studies* 57.231 (2006): 456–73. Jeremy Dimmick is the only clear exception; he reads *Greene's Vision* as investigating authorial identity, engaging with a medieval English literary tradition, and playfully exploring mock conversions. His essay "Gower, Chaucer, and the art of Repentance" has greatly influenced my reading of Greene's late mock repentance pamphlets.

²¹ Robert Greene, *The Life and Complete Works in Prose and Verse of Robert Greene, M.A.*, ed. Alexander Grossart, 15 vols. (1886; New York: Russell & Russell, 1964), 1:xii.

²² Lawrence Manley, *Literature and Culture in Early Modern London* (Cambridge, New York, et al.: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 322.

²³ Anita Obermeier, *The History and Anatomy of Auctorial Self-Criticism in the European Middle Ages*. Internationale Forschungen zur Allgemeinen und Vergleichenden Literaturwissenschaft, 32 (Amsterdam and Atlanta: Editions Rodopi, 1999), 185.

poems, *The House of Fame* and *The Parliament of Fowls*," while purporting to regret his earlier use of Chaucerian poetics.²⁴ Like Ovid's early repentances, Greene's late repentances construct "elaborate literary game[s] . . . of affirmation and negation" (35).

In spite of arguments to the contrary, then, the repentance in *Groatsworth* is neither autobiography nor the work of someone else. It is rather one in a series of Greene's mock repentance pamphlets which uses the Carnival tradition of mimesis in order to undermine the authority of a univocal truth foisted upon readers by antitheatrical Puritans. Antitheatrical Puritans not only demonized the theater but they also attacked the multivalent nature of artistic language. In the spirit of Carnival, therefore, Greene turns the dramatics of Puritan godly and anti-theatrical writing together with the Puritan practices of conversion, prophesying, and usury into a parodic and, thereby, multivocal farce.²⁵

Hypocritically, Philip Stubbes denounces the theater, in *Anatomy of Abuses*, while instantiating his own dramatic literature in *A Chrystal Glass for Christian Women*; in response, Greene performs in *Groatsworth* a Puritanesque deathbed conversion.²⁶ Greene's parody of deathbed conversion and, more specifically, of Philip Stubbes's *Crystal Glass for Christian Women* is best illuminated by another of Greene's writing, *The Defense of Coney-catching*. Perhaps because it was less allegorical or perhaps because it was written pseudonymously, in the *Defense of Coney-catching* Greene is more straightforward about his contempt for Philip Stubbes's writing. Greene deflates into bathetic farce Stubbs's elevation of his wife Katherine as paradigm of virtue through her deathbed conversion, or godly dying.²⁷ Greene, through the character of Cuthbert, refers to Stubbs's wife as his "old mistress" (13) and accuses Stubbs of making her into the "Legend" (13) of an "English she-saint," (13) not forgetting so much as her dog, "Tobie" (13).²⁸ *Chrystal Glass* was exemplary in its representation of Puritan deathbed conversion. Paul Lim has argued that the concept of conversion was crucial to the Puritan religious experience, and as Eamon Duffy explains, it did not just mean "bringing the

²⁴ Dimmick, "The Art of Repentance," 470, 460, 468.

²⁵ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 76. Bakhtin claims, "every parody is an intentional dialogized hybrid."

²⁶ Philip Stubbes, *Anatomy of Abuses in England in Shakespeare's Youth*, ed. Frederick J. Furnicall, 2 vol (1877; London: The New Shakespeare Society, 1882), 146.

²⁷ Paul C. H. Lim, *Cambridge Companion to Puritanism*, eds. John Coffey and Paul C. H. Lim (Cambridge, New York, et al.: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 232. The term 'conversion' in Puritan theology was used to express greater passion in the believer's relationship with God.

²⁸ Robert Greene, *The Defense of Coney-catching, The Life and Complete Works in Prose and Verse of Robert Greene M.A.*, ed. Alexander Grossart, 15 vols. (1886; New York: Russell & Russell, 1964), vol. 13.

heathen to knowledge of the gospel, but bringing the tepid to the boil by awakening preaching, creating a godly people out of a nation of conformists."²⁹

In "Crystal Glass," Katherine's dying sermon is a fevered crescendo of religious conviction meant to inspire. She exclaims as she is dying, "Welcome, welcome sweet death . . . Welcome, the messenger of my good jailer . . . strike . . . strike my heart, I feare not thy stroke . . ." (244).³⁰ Stubbes represents her last words with a frenetic and hypnotically repetitive kind of poetry that is almost irresistible. However, Greene seems to have resisted it. Greene, as Cuthbert Cony-catcher, claims that Stubbes was in fact a "learned hypocrite" (79) and "a most poetical brethren," (79) suggesting that his deathbed conversion was more a hypocritical artistic creation than a matter-of-fact account of his wife's death. Moreover, Greene's allusion to Katherine Stubbs's dog in *Defense* is absurdly reductive. The name "Tobie" (79) is never given in the "Crystal Glass"; in fact, the dog is said to be a bitch. Greene parodies this moment of overkill in Stubbs's work (if we assume, as Greene apparently has, that the pamphlet embellishes the truth), when the dying Katherine, in order to be represented as virtuous, has to renounce not only the love of her child, in her relinquishing of the world for Jesus, but also the love of her dog. Furthermore, Greene associates Stubbes and, by extension, Puritan godly dying literature with the Catholic tradition of canonization. He accuses Stubbes of making his wife into an "English she-saint" (79).

The deathbed conversion in *Groatsworth* is likewise anti-Puritan, adding a mockery of the Puritans' conflation of wealth and piety to the spiritual pretentiousness that Greene implies accompanies this deathbed genre. As does *Defense*, *Groatsworth* deflates deathbed conversions into farce, making a mockery of the general godly dying pamphlet and the literature of Puritan conversion, basically creating a topsy-turvy world through his parodic strategy. Greene markets his supposedly imminent death like a hawker selling his wares. By echoing the voice of penitent dying, in his own dubious conversions, Greene suggests that the mention of dying conversion in Puritan pamphlets, like Stubbes's *Chrystal Glass*, is an advertizing strategy. The title of his *Vision* is followed by the description, "written at the instant of his death . . . Containing a penitent passion for the folly of his pen."³¹ The title for *Groatsworth* is similarly "Written before his death and published at his dying request."³² Finally, and perhaps most hilariously,

²⁹ Eamon Duffy, "The Long Reformation: Catholicism, Protestantism, and the Multitude," *England's Long Reformations 1500–1800*, ed. Nicholas Tyacke (New York and London: Routledge, 1998), 42.

³⁰ Philip Stubbes, "A Crystal Glass for Christian Women," *Renaissance Woman: a Sourcebook: Constructions of Femininity in England*, ed. Kate Aughterson (New York and London: Routledge, 1995), 244.

³¹ Robert Greene, *Greene's Vision, The Life and Complete Works in Prose and Verse of Robert Greene M.A.*, ed. Alexander Grossart, 15 vols. (1886; New York: Russell & Russell, 1964), 12:1.

³² Robert Greene, *Greene's Groatsworth of Wit: Bought with a Million of Repentance, The Life and Complete*

The Repentance claims to represent the author's own death, "wherein by himself is laid open his loose life, with the manner of his death."³³ It is rare indeed that an author is able to describe the manner of his own death, but Greene does so in some detail,

During all the time of his sickness he was never heard to swear, rave or blaspheme the name of God . . . he continually called upon God, and recited . . . these lines:

O Lord, forgive me my manifold offences.

O Lord, have mercy upon me . . . And with suchlike godly sentences he passed the time, even till he gave up the ghost (158).

This description not only reveals the farce at the heart of *Groatsworth*, the lack of sincerity in the dying repentant who is able to talk about himself in the third person, it also situates Greene as a parodic Puritan. He refers to his "sentences" as very pointedly godly.

The conversion experience in *Groatsworth* is less optimistic than the conversion experience in *Repentance*, and Greene's emphasis is more economic. *Groatsworth* is an inverted version of the Prodigal Son parable. In Greene's parable, avarice replaces generosity. The father, Gorinius, is an unmerciful usurer who disinherits rather than forgives his son Roberto. Roberto is the prodigal son, and his prodigality is reflected in his opposition to usury. Roberto's morality, his speaking out against usury, initially brings about his downfall. It also supposedly brings about Greene's downfall, as the dying Greene claims that Roberto's story is actually his own. In keeping with this inversion of Christian theology in *Groatsworth*, instead of the faith-inspiring godly sentences that are similar to Katherine Stubbes's conviction in *Chrystal Glass*, the reader is given some downright preposterous rules to follow.

Rule number one incongruously juxtaposes various Psalms that contain references to the fear of God as wisdom and affirm the immovable strength gained from an allegiance with God.³⁴ The first rule enjoins, "Let his word be a lanterne to your feet, and a light unto your paths, then shall you stand as firme as rocks, and not be moved" (139). Confounding his own metaphor of travel, Greene claims that if you allow the light of God's wisdom to guide you, you will go nowhere. He thus parodies the Puritan notoriety for outlandish interpretations of scripture.³⁵

Works in Prose and Verse of Robert Greene M.A., ed. Alexander Grossart, 15 vols. (1886; New York: Russell & Russell, 1964), 12:97.

³³ Robert Greene, *The Repentance of Robert Greene, The Life and Complete Works in Prose and Verse of Robert Greene, M.A.*, 12:151.

³⁴ For a discussion of the Psalms referenced here, see Thomas Cobb, "A Critical edition of Robert Greene's 'Groatsworth of Wit,'" Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1977, 47a.

³⁵ Aaron Michael Myers, "Representation and Misrepresentation of the Puritan in Elizabethan Drama," Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1931, 116.

Rule ten advices, "if thou be a Sonne or Servant, despise not reproofe: for though correction bee bitter at first, it bringth pleasure in the end" (141). His father, Gorinius, specifically instructs his son to pretend to "be devout," to learn about conscience from "Machiavels works" and through usury to "make spoil of yoong Gallants" (108–09).

If Greene had listened to his father, and the reader takes *Groatsworth* as a sincere autobiography, then Greene could not have followed the rest of his precepts that have to do with fearing God, "not building thy house upon thy neighbors hurt," or being a "usurer" (140). Furthermore, Gorinius is a caricature drawn from the anti-Puritan satire of the period as is evident from his lack of conscience, his usury, and his hypocrisy.

Most critical attention to Greene's *Groatsworth* has focused on the dying repentance in which Greene claims to be Roberto, the main character, composing *Groatsworth* on his deathbed, repentant of his career as a writer. However, the deathbed portion of *Groatsworth* is only the end of the story. The deathbed conversion is preceded by the story of how Roberto, who the reader is to believe is actually Greene, came to such an end. Greene uses an inverted version of the Prodigal Son parable for the story of Roberto's downfall. It is in Greene's particular treatment of the Prodigal Son story that his parody of Puritans as antitheatrical hypocrites is fully developed. Through the parable of the Prodigal Son, Greene is able to revile the Puritan practice of usury as antithetical to the spirit of Christianity, to tie this usury to hypocritical antitheatrical pamphlet publishing, and to link all of this to Stephen Gosson. Through Greene's mimetic farce, Gosson becomes, in turn, the father, the son, and the spirit behind Greene's mockery of conversion. Gosson's anti-theatrical prejudice was predicated on a typical Puritan, anti-Catholic hysteria that eschewed symbols, the metaphoric, and, indeed anything that blurred categorical distinctions.

As former playwright and current pamphleteer, Gosson hypocritically argues in *School of Abuse* that poets are jugglers who "casteth a myst to work the closer" (10). Then, using a number of metaphors to illustrate the danger of metaphoric art, Gosson employs images of duality in order to warn against misrepresentation; he claims that, when one thing is represented as another, the reader is involved in the sin of lying. The reader becomes, like the artist, a hypocrite. He writes, "The Syrens songue is the saylers wracke; the fowlers whistle the birds death" (10), and he warns that poets are able to turn "reasonable creatures into brute beastes" (10). It does not take as great a genius as Greene's to see the irony in Gosson's writing metaphorically about the dangers of metaphor. Gosson's Puritanical inveighing against figurative language, while simultaneously publishing richly figurative antitheatrical pamphlets, reveals his hypocrisy. Greene links this hypocrisy to the avarice and trickery that subtends Puritan antitheatrical prejudice; Greed, then,

informs their niggardly attitude toward the metaphoric and perverts the generosity of the Christ-like art of writing.

Stephen Gosson had challenged defenders of poetry to find scriptural justification for the literary arts, and Greene's use of the Prodigal Son parable not only meets that challenge it uses it to undermine the Puritan's claim to univocality as godly. Reveling in the multivocal disguise of parody, Greene becomes a parodic Puritan. His mirroring fractures the illusion of singular identity or meaning in Puritan discourse. Moreover, through the inversion of the Prodigal Son story, an allegory about conversion and the abundant generosity of God, Greene attacks the ungodly avarice of the Puritan's bias against art and, out of the grave of this Puritanical overly reverential divinity, he resurrects the boundrylessness and multivocality of a more charitable Christian theology.

As Jonas Barish argues in *The Antitheatrical Prejudice*, underlying much of the Puritans' prejudice against theatrics was an antipathy toward a metamorphic ontology. In fact, Barish points out that Gosson wages a particularly Puritan ontological war in his attack against the theater that excludes both faith and positive representations of transformation. Barish writes, "The human mind, in this reductive view [and here he quotes Gosson], 'is simple without mixture or composition, without mingle mangle of fish & flesh, good & bad . . . [W]here both are proffered, the hereditary corruption of our nature taketh the worst and leaveth the best.'" ³⁶ Barish concludes that "free choice and self-definition form no part of [the Puritan's] scheme" (89), at least not consciously. ³⁷ Moreover, according to Barish, within Christian tradition there has always been not one God but two: "Alongside the God of self-sufficiency, dwelling in his . . . immobility, there was a . . . God of Emanation, the streaming source of creative energy" (107). Likewise, "[A]longside the austerer moralist . . . there were others . . . who responded more to the divine multiplicity . . . expressive of the variousness of human potentiality" (107). Embracing the divine multiplicity of Christianity and the liberty in transformation, Greene attacks Gosson in order not only to accuse Puritans in general of the equally theatric practice of social climbing and the hypocrisy of hiding beneath a mask of Christian piety, a standard accusation against Puritans, but also to redeem a metamorphic ontology.

Christianity's central myth is metamorphic. It is a religion filled with stories of conversions, transformations, and resurrections. Greene chooses the story of the Prodigal Son to represent the metamorphic ontology within Christianity. The Prodigal Son involves the believer or reader in an act of generosity, a "willing

³⁶ Jonas Barish, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1981), 89.
³⁷ Obviously, the self-transformation in either upward mobility or the inward speculation in Puritan devotion did not come to mind for Puritans when they were railing against transformation on the stage.

suspension of disbelief," or faith. The merciful father says of the prodigal son that he "was dead and is alive again . . .," meaning, of course, that he did not die, but that he was radically altered, that through his act of faith, his returning, the prodigal son is reborn (Luke 15:34–35).³⁸ The story also involves another act of generosity. The father represents God's mercy which does not look too closely at past selves, as the brother in the story would have the father do; instead, he assists in the prodigal son's transformation by believing he has changed, by ignoring what he has done or who he has been. Moreover, his transformation is divine. Like Christ, he is resurrected.

In *Groatsworth*, Greene inverts the story of the prodigal son. At first, the son, Roberto, seems to be more moral than the usurer father, Gorinius. When the son returns home from the academy, his father provides a feast. Roberto's sin is that while in the company of his father and his neighbors, who are all referred to as "execrable usurers," he "invay[s] mightly against that abhorred vice, in so much that hee urges tears from divers of their eyes, and compunction in some of their harts" (107–08). For this sin, Roberto is disinherited, a turn of plot that inverts the message of divine mercy originally provided by the story of the prodigal son. In *Groatsworth*, the prodigal's father becomes a stereotypical character of Puritan hypocrisy.³⁹ Gorinius is "religious . . . never without a book at his belt . . . or a bolt in his mouthe, readye to shoote through his sinfull neighbor" (101), and, yet, he is also described as a man of "exceeding wealth" (104–05) and "large conscience," who considers it "foole-holy" to "make scruple of conscience where profit presents itself" (108). Moreover, Gorinius is not only a Puritan but he is an art-despising Puritan of the Gosson variety. When talking about Roberto to his favorite younger son he continuously demeans him "as a beggerly artist" (107), displaying the same antitheatrical prejudice that Gosson displays in *School of Abuse*.

Despising the transformative in art and drawing on the anti-Catholic iconoclastic discourse of the period, Gosson likens artists and their writing to "sepulchres" that hide "nothing but deade bones . . . fresh pictures on rotten wallles."⁴⁰ Greene's representation of Puritan discourse exposes a paradox at the heart of Puritan antitheatrical prejudice: no writing can exhibit the kind of univocality that Puritans, like Gosson, desire. According to Samuel Weber, in his book *Theatricality as Medium*,

³⁸ *The Geneva Bible*, 1560 Edition, with an intro. by Lloyd E. Berry. Rpt. of the 1969 facsimile ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2007).

³⁹ Aaron Myers, *Representation*, 92. Myers claims that "So deeply is this belief in the essential hypocrisy of the Puritan embedded in the minds of the dramatists that the word 'Puritan' is regarded as a synonym of 'hypocrite.'"

⁴⁰ Stephen Gosson, *School of Abuse*, 4. For evidence of the language of anti-Catholic representations, see Alison Shell, *Catholicism, Controversy, and the English Literary Imagination, 1558–1660* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

The process of signifying always leaves something *out* and something *over*, an excess that is also a deficit, or as Derrida has formulated it, “a remainder” It is the irreducibility of this remainder that, ultimately, renders language theatrical and theatricality significant.”⁴¹

Perceiving the theatricality in Gosson’s antitheatrical prejudice, Greene stages the hypocrisy that condemns duality only in artistic discourse and suggests that this duplicity is in fact Puritan. He draws upon the anti-Puritan satire of the period to show the theatrics of the social climber. Moreover, the Puritan Gorinius is a Machiavel, a name synonymous with theatricality and unethical social mobility.

Greene’s mockery of Puritan economic practices reflects an anxiety in the period. As R. H. Tawney argues, Puritans were “reviled . . . as parvenus, usurers, and blood suckers.”⁴² Moreover, they were regarded with “suspicion” and were thought in their “swift rise to prosperity . . . to have applied sordid means to the pursuit of antisocial ends” (209). Georges Bataille confirmingly adds, “Calvin abandoned the doctrinal condemnation of loans at interest,” and Puritans were thought to be strict Calvinists.⁴³ On the other hand, those Protestants (including Luther) who continued to consider usury a sin associated it not only with lending money at interest but also with trickery, fraud, and a lack of industry.⁴⁴ Moreover, profits from usury were thought not to arise from any substantial labor or work but from mere avarice, greed, trickery, and manipulation. *Groatsworth* represents usury as Puritan by associating it with the hypocritical, greedy and prosperous Gorinius.

Although Greene initially sets up an opposition between the money grubbing father and the prodigal son, suggesting that the son has higher principals, Roberto proves to be just as hypocritical as his father, particularly as a playwright; not only does he write for profit (a materialistic motive that he criticizes in his father) but he also creates fiction in order to bring about the destruction of others, as is demonstrated in the play-like con he devises to usurp his brother’s inheritance. The similarity to Gosson, an antitheatrical playwright turned pamphleteer, is not coincidental.

⁴¹ Samuel Weber, *Theatricality as Medium* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004), x.

⁴² R. H. Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* (1926; New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 2008), 209.

⁴³ Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share*, trans., Robert Hurley (1989; New York: Zone Books, 2002), 122.

⁴⁴ David Jones, *Reforming the Morality of Usury: A Study of Differences that Separated the Protestant Reformers* (Dallas, TX, and Oxford: University Press of America, 2004), 55. See Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (orig. in German, 1905; 1958; New York: Dover Publications, 2003), 79–92.

When Roberto is disinherited for speaking out against his father's usury, Gorinius leaves everything to his younger brother Luciano except for one "old groat."⁴⁵ This he leaves to Roberto, saying that as he himself started with one groat, it is his belief that by thus reducing Roberto to poverty, he will induce him to be more like himself. He considers himself industrious. Roberto, however, views his industry as perverse because it is built upon fraud and the unethical economic practice of usury.

Industry was of particular importance to Puritans and Protestants alike, but, whereas Luther introduced the Protestant idea of a calling, he opposed the social mobility that Max Weber attributes to Calvin alone. According to Weber, Luther held that "The pursuit of material gain beyond personal needs . . . appear[ed] as a symptom of a lack of grace, and since it could only be attained at the expense of others, directly reprehensible."⁴⁶ Roberto's aversion to his father's type of industry, his economic gain at the expense of others, reflects a Lutheran perspective, but Greene goes even beyond Luther, associating all industry with fraud and suggesting that as soon as Roberto leaves the aesthetic life, the life of the scholarly artist, he enters a world of debauchery. Gorinius is a stereotypical Puritan averse to art and learning.⁴⁷ He responds to Roberto's urging that he renounce usury by suggesting Roberto look to his own sin, and, though he never says what those sins are, he immediately begins to rail against "beggerly artists" and their abundance of words. This denunciation, together with his reducing Roberto's inheritance simply "to books," suggests an opposition between his and Roberto's ideas of wealth and knowledge. Roberto initially values art and learning; it is Gorinius's intention to make him value money and cunning instead by reducing him to poverty, leaving him one "old groat."⁴⁸

The father's plan works. His inverted value scheme makes his son a hypocritical antitheatrical playwright just like Gosson. The first time Roberto joins forces with the prostitute, Lamilia, with whom he devises a plan to dupe his brother of his inheritance, he is being fraudulent. Lamilia then reveals Roberto's scheme to Luciano and thwarts Roberto's plans. Eventually, Roberto meets a player and profits as a playwright, which is not associated with avarice but prodigality. He wastes his wealth, but his true sin comes when he is reduced again to a mere groat and must value money not art. He decides to "see if [he] can sell to *carelesse* youth what [he] negligently forgot to buy."⁴⁹ In other words, like his father, he will

⁴⁵ Robert Greene, *Groatsworth*, 107.

⁴⁶ Weber, *Protestant*, 84.

⁴⁷ See John Morgan, *Godly Learning: Puritan Attitudes Towards Reason, Learning and Education, 1560–1640* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 41–79.

⁴⁸ Greene, *Groatsworth*, 107.

⁴⁹ Greene, *Groatsworth*, 107.

exploit the spendthrift “yoong Gentlemen” (189), by selling them bogus advice pamphlets. As Alexandra Halasz argues in *The Market place of Print: Pamphlets and the Public Sphere in Early Modern England*,

Roberto’s resolution to “sell to carelesse youth what [he] negligently forgot to buy” indentifies pamphlet writing with the father’s practice of “mak[ing] spoyle of yoong Gallants (12) as if, like usury, pamphlet writing both created and consumed wealth without creating value . . . (31)

Greene’s parody of antitheatrical pamphlets reveals that Gosson’s maligning of art, much like the general Puritan economic practice of usury, as practiced by Gorinius, is based upon false piety and is actually predicated upon avarice.

Greene’s blurring of distinction between Gosson and Greene, between Greene and Roberto, and between Roberto and Gorinius is related to both Stubbes’s and Gosson’s antitheatricalism. Greene’s mimicry throughout the pamphlet is carnivalesque mimicry, which Michael Bristol defines as a “mimicry or ‘seeming-to-be-other’ . . . [that] confuses the categories of identity and difference” in such a way that it threatens the univocal sovereign voice, breaking down the authority of a “fixed and conclusive ideology.”⁵⁰ Greene is not just interested in exposing Gosson’s hypocrisy in *Groatsworth*; he is also attempting to redeem the liberty of the artist from a Puritan prison house of meaning by revealing the polysemic, multivocal reality behind constructions of the self.

Both Greene and Gosson wed constructions of the self to constructions of meaning. Gosson does so seemingly unconsciously; Greene does so in the highly conscious act of parody. In Gosson, as in Greene, ostensibly singular subjects are actually multiple. The poet stands in for poets, players, and playwrights; as players disguise, so poets’ meaning is deceitful. The theatricality in language or any figurative act is sinful, suggestive of the Puritans’ oft-raised objection to a man wearing women’s clothing, which in Puritanism apparently applies to any seeming to be other. Greene’s mimicry, however, suggests a nonessential ontology in which seeming is the only option.

An image of a mask adorns Greene’s title page. In the tradition of the Carnival, Greene evokes the mask variously throughout *Groatsworth* not only by unmasking hypocrisy but also by suggesting its relationship to creation and divinity. The mask is central to the presentation of authorial identity as divine, in sacred parody, and the eternally dying Greene is born again in at least three pamphlets. The mask is one of the symbols most commonly associated with carnival, but its religious significance has become obscured. According to Bakhtin, the mask is connected with “the joy of change and reincarnation . . . it rejects conformity to oneself,” and

⁵⁰ Michael Bristol, *Carnival and Theater: Plebeian Culture and the Structure of Authority in Renaissance England* (New York and London: Routledge, 1985), 21.

it "is related to transition, metamorphoses, [and] the violation of natural boundaries."⁵¹ It is precisely this carnivalesque identity that characterizes Greene's Christ-like manifestations in his late repentance pamphlets. Greene often liked to play upon his name, associating himself with renewal and the 'green' of spring, and in the repentance pamphlets, he becomes a Christ-like "Lord of life and death."⁵² As Barish notes, "at one critical moment in history, God also [like Greene] disguised himself and assumed the condition of change."⁵³ Greene's repeated incarnations evoke the grotesque body and the lack of boundaries between life and death that resurrection expresses. In fact, he continues to incarnate through his pamphlets as the critic's belief in his real presence reveals. Autobiographical readings are on-going testaments to the miracle of this mockery.

⁵¹ Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 40.

⁵² Greene, *Repentance*, 187.

⁵³ Barish, *Antitheatrical*, 113.

Chapter 24

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The Comedy of the Shrew: Theorizing Humor in Early Modern Netherlandish Art

Vicious shrews wielding household weaponry browbeat men into meek submission, angry scolds violently reprimand drunken and adulterous husbands, overbearing wives usurp patriarchal power by stealing their husbands' trousers and forcing them to do female chores—such is the nature of numerous Netherlandish images dating from the late sixteenth through the first half of the seventeenth century. The caricatured visages of the figures and their uproarious antics obviously provided particularly humorous entertainment for contemporary viewers. Indeed, the comic purpose of these images spoke directly to a culture currently embroiled in a weighty discourse over changing gender roles and particularly over the power of women in the society at large.

Prior to an analysis of the technologies of humor embedded in these images, however, it is important to introduce the rather humorless scrutiny that has dominated the scholarship on early modern Netherlandish art since the 1960s. As a matter of fact, most examinations of this art have focused on its sternly moralizing character. In particular, Eddy de Jongh set a model for this type of research through a number of publications that likened the emblems and writings of Dutch moralists such as Jacob Cats (1577–1660) to paintings and prints in order to “uncover” the hidden didactic warnings beneath the surface of seemingly descriptive scenes of ordinary life.¹ The popularity of this methodological practice

¹ For early examples of this iconological method, see Eddy de Jongh, *Zinne- en minnebeelden in de schilderkunst van de zeventiende eeuw* (Amsterdam: Nederlands Stichting Openbaar Kunstbezit, 1967); Eddy de Jongh, “Erotica in vogelperspectief: De dubbelzinnigheid van een reeks 17de eeuwse genrevoorstellingen,” *Simiolus* 3.1 (1968–1969): 22–74. For an exhibition catalog devoted to de Jongh's methods, see *Tot lering en vermaak. betekenissen van Hollandse genrevoorstellingen uit*

is witnessed in the plethora of writings that thereafter inundated the field with sternly moralizing behavioral injunctions cited in works covering almost every category of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Netherlandish art: landscapes, still lifes, genre scenes and even portraiture.² Only a few scholars braved to suggest that perhaps people actually laughed at this imagery, and one of the most important of these was Svetlana Alpers. In her article, "Realism as a Comic Mode: Low-life Painting Seen Through Bredero's Eyes," she suggested that one should view images of peasants in connection with the comic and entertaining poetry of the day, as found in collections of the Amsterdam author Gerbrand Adriaensz Bredero.³ In response to this hypothesis, the Dutch critic Hessel Miedema was particularly harsh in reasserting the oppressive moralizing character of the art. He contended that persons of erudition in the early modern era would not have laughed, but would have only smiled with a closed mouth.

According to Miedema, "The harder someone laughed the closer he was to the object of that laughter: the aggressive scoffer, the doltish peasant."⁴ Much of this debate revolved around the peasant imagery of Pieter Bruegel and whether or not it should be viewed in a primarily moralizing vein that denigrated the crude and boorish behavior of peasants. Instead, Alpers asserted that the contemporary viewer would have found enjoyment in the humorous antics of the peasants, much as did the sixteenth-century artist biographer, Karel van Mander.⁵ Alpers' suggestion that art was connected with humorous texts of the era should not have come as such a surprise to scholars of Netherlandish art. Indeed, Sturla Jonasson Gudlaugsson had correspondingly noted that the seventeenth-century Dutch artist Jan Steen's comedic paintings frequently included figures from the Italian *Comedia dell'arte*, such as *Pantalone* and *Policinella*.⁶

de zeventiende eeuw (Amsterdam: Rijksmuseum, 1976).

² For genre painting, see Peter C. Sutton, Christopher Brown, Jane Iandola Watkins, *Masters of Seventeenth-Century Dutch Genre Painting* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1984); for still life painting, see Eddy de Jongh, Titia van Leeuwen, Andrea Gasten, Hilary Sayles, *Still-Life in the Age of Rembrandt* (Auckland: Auckland City Art Gallery, 1982); for portraiture, see Eddy de Jongh, *Portretten van echt en trouw: huwelijk en gezin in de Nederlandse kunst van de zeventiende eeuw* (Zwolle: Waanders; Haarlem: Frans Halsmuseum, 1986); for landscape painting, see Peter C. Sutton, Albert Blankert, Josua Bruyn, Alan Chong, Simon Schama, *Masters of Seventeenth-Century Dutch Landscape Painting* (Amsterdam: Rijksmuseum; Boston: Boston Museum of Fine Arts; Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1987).

³ Svetlana Alpers, "Realism as a Comic Mode: Low-life Painting Seen Through Bredero's Eyes," *Simiolus* 8.3 (1975-1976): 115-44.

⁴ Hessel Miedema, "Realism and Comic Mode: The Peasant," *Simiolus* 9.4 (1977): 205-19.

⁵ Alpers, "Comic Mode," 139.

⁶ Sturla Jonasson Gudlaugsson, *The Comedians in the Work of Jan Steen and His Contemporaries* (Soest: Davaco, 1975); see also Mariët Westermann, *The Amusements of Jan Steen: Comic Painting in the Seventeenth Century* (Zwolle: Waanders, 1997).

Only recently, however, have scholars begun to study more thoroughly the humorous nature of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Netherlandish discourse. Rudolf Dekker, for example, has recently tried to overthrow old stereotypes of the Dutch as a traditionally sober and humorless lot.⁷ Specifically, analyzing Aernout van Overbeke's contemporary collection of jokes and anecdotes, he suggests that such texts indicate that the Dutch had a great deal to laugh about. In regard to art specifically, Walter Gibson has recently attempted to recover the humorous character of the sixteenth-century Netherlandish artist Pieter Bruegel's art.⁸ He emphasizes Bruegel's use of such comic tools as caricature in order to insist that the artist intended many of his works as humorous satire rather than moralizing prescription. He also analyzes the patronage of Bruegel in order to assert that these wealthy owners of Bruegel's peasant scenes, in particular, would have enjoyed their fun aspects much as those patrons would have enjoyed their respite amongst actual peasant festivities while visiting their country estates.

Of particular significance for this discussion, Gibson also examines Bruegel's famous *Dulle Griet* painting of 1661. He analyzes the image as a humorous literal transcription of the proverb regarding an evil Griet, a name traditionally given to shrewish women, who was so ill-tempered that she even dared to enter Hell and tie the devil to a cushion. The proverb went on to lament that she also used violence against her husband by binding him to a sharp-pinned hackle.⁹ Thus, bands of aggressive women are strewn throughout *Dulle Griet*, fighting, capturing, and subduing devils. This proverbial Griet will later transform into the common Griet of daily life with the images to be discussed in this article.

In reviewing this debate, it is difficult to understand how any scholar would have suggested, as did Miedema, that a portion of any society was without laughter. Rod A. Martin asserted in a recent encyclopedia of psychology that humor is a universal human phenomenon that does not always, but most commonly, elicits laughter. Furthermore, he asserts that laughter is experienced regularly by both men and women, and that even infants start to laugh by four months of age.¹⁰ Evidence of the universality of humor in culture is found in

⁷ Rudolf M. Dekker, *Humour in Dutch Culture of the Golden Age* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001). Dekker and Corien Glaudemans also recently discovered and discussed another seventeenth-century joke book by Samuel van Huls in *Ha Ha Den Haag: 125 Haagse moppen en raadsels uit de 17de eeuw* (The Hague: Haags Gemeente Archief, 2009).

⁸ Walter Gibson, *Pieter Bruegel and the Art of Laughter* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

⁹ The legend and its relationship to Bruegel's painting are thoroughly discussed in Jan Grauls, *Volkstaal en volksleven in het werk van Pieter Bruegel* (Antwerp: N.V. Standaard-Boekhandel, 1957), 6–41. Roemer Visscher elaborates on the legend and Griet's use of a hackle in the seventeenth century. See Nicolaas van der Laan, *Uit Roemer Visscher's Brabbelingh* (Utrecht: Oosthoek, 1918), 60.

¹⁰ Rod A. Martin, "Humor and Laughter," *Encyclopedia of Psychology*, ed. Alan E. Kazdin, vol. 4

various philosophical discussions dating from as early as ancient times. Plato, for example, identified the purpose of humor in Greek theater as a means of ridiculing those who are relatively weaker than the audience members. Thus, humorous entertainment gave the participant a sense of positive superiority. Subsequently, superiority became one of the major theoretical models in discussions regarding humor for centuries.¹¹ Aristotle also subscribed to superiority as a source for humor.¹² Furthermore, Aristotle's discussion of incongruity, the unexpected error or surprise, as a source for humorous experience inspired theoretical discussions through to modern times.¹³

In addition to superiority and incongruity theories, significant attention has also been given to the development of various relief and coping theories. Although much of this type of humor investigation was based on psychoanalysis and Freud's ideas regarding humor as a means of discharging pent up psychic energy, it soon influenced discussions in psychology, sociology, and anthropology.¹⁴ Also, as expected, much of the historical interest in humor was centered in literary criticism. Indeed, all three major theoretical perspectives on humor—superiority, incongruity, and relief—are to be found in literary theories dating from the Renaissance through early modern and current writings. Furthermore, other disciplines as diverse as biology and communications have also entered into an analysis and theorizing of humor since early modern times.¹⁵

(Washington, DC: American Psychological Association; Oxford: New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 202–04; see also Albrecht Classen's "Introduction" to the present volume.

¹¹ For a discussion on Plato's philosophy of humor, see Edmund Bergler, *Laughter and the Sense of Humor* (New York: Intercontinental Medical Book Corp., 1956), 3. Superiority theories are discussed in a number of books on humor including *The Psychology of Humor: Theoretical Perspectives and Empirical Issues*, ed. Jeffrey H. Goldstein and Paul E. McGhee (New York: Academic Press, 1972); David H. Monroe, *Argument of Laughter* (Melbourne, Australia: Melbourne University Press, 1951); and Stephen Leacock, *Humour: Its Theory and Technique, with Examples and Samples: a Book of Discovery* (London: John Lane, the Bodley Head, 1935).

¹² Several individuals discuss superiority in connection with Aristotle including: Daniel E. Berlyne, "Laughter, Humor, and Play," *The Handbook of Social Psychology*, ed. Gardner Lindzey, and Elliot Aronson, vol. 3 (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1968–1970, 2d ed.), 795–852; Patricia Keith-Spiegel, "Early Conceptions of Humor: Varieties and Issues," *The Psychology of Humor: Theoretical Perspectives and Empirical Issues*, ed. Jeffrey H. Goldstein and Paul E. McGhee (New York: Academic Press, 1972), 3–39; Martin, "Humor and Laughter," 202–03.

¹³ For a discussion of Aristotle and incongruity, see John Morreall, *The Philosophy of Laughter and Humor* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1987), 14.

¹⁴ A brief definition and discussion of the development of Freudian relief theory is provided in *The Gale Encyclopedia of Psychology*, ed. Susan B. Gall, Bernard Beins, Alan J. Feldman (Detroit, MI: Gale Research, 1996), 183.

¹⁵ A helpful introduction to various past and present theoretical approaches to humor is given in Jon E. Roeckelein, *The Psychology of Humor: A Reference Guide and Annotated Bibliography* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2002).

Yet, in spite of the obvious universality of the comic in all cultures, much less attention has been given to humor theorizing in the visual arts. And, as previously mentioned, there has been an antagonism in even countenancing the existence of humor in early-modern Netherlandish imagery. Nevertheless, an examination of the theme of the overbearing woman will reveal not only the presence of humor in these artifacts, it will also provide an opportunity for further cultural theorizing about this society generally. Indeed, a major conclusion to be drawn will be that many of the major characteristics of traditional humor are to be found in these works of art.

One of the most important and earliest-identified aspects of humor is the appearance of error or incongruity. This laughter-inciting element of surprise will be a major element in images where termagant shrews are involved in such “unnatural” behaviors as usurping patriarchal authority in both metaphorical and actual battles. Theatrical comedies exaggerate these “worst” characteristics in human beings, and this is also the emphasis in the images under analysis. In fact, as has already been noted, art was frequently connected to the farces of the period. Typical of the farces of the period, the images also deal with the comic actions of everyday life. In addition, another aspect of the comedy, treating features of current social discourse, is also evident in the visual examples. As with the farce, the comic traits of the characters are emphasized in the images in order to examine current attitudes regarding the gender roles of both women and men during this period of social, political, and religious upheaval. Many of the images occur in print form, and the accompanying inscriptions at times even give the characters meaningful names and identities that further elucidate meaning. The slapstick nature of many of these images also associates them with contemporary farces. The comedy in slapstick derives from the humorous use of weapons and violence in order to elicit laughter over the predicament of the victim. Likewise, the images often greatly exaggerate the ferociousness of the women wielding weapons in outrageous displays of actual or threatened violence. Significantly, the humor of both theater and art provides a cathartic release of tensions related to certain social anxieties that at once both ridicules and familiarizes the depicted behavior.

Continuing with this comparison of genres, it becomes evident that other common facets of traditional humor are frequently employed in these images. One of the most common tools of humor is the use of caricature. In particular, the ludicrous distortions of the figures’ physiognomies are clearly intended to incite humor. Also, the exaggerated actions of the characters’ behavior become a laughable feature of the images whether in the ferocious violence of the women or the weak submission of the men. Frequently, a fool, jester, or comedian is used to “tell” the joke and to make its related meanings clear to the audience. This figure will appear in various forms during the development of the overbearing-wife theme in art. Like the verbal joker, the artist/comedian soothes anxieties

regarding contemporary social threats. At times, the humor found in the caricatures and the exaggerated actions of shrewish wives becomes so vicious in its ridicule that the laughter involved is both cynical and bitter. Such satire relates metaphorically at times to broader political and social themes, as is typical of humorists throughout time.

Further evidence of the humorous nature of these images is found in the recurrent use of puns. A major contributor to the overall humorous effect is the *double entendre* of objects that are used in the plot but that also refer to the derisive nicknames given to women and men involved in inappropriate gender roles. Such punning and joking closely links the art to the joke books that appeared during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. One such work, as previously mentioned, was van Overbeke's collection of anecdotes and jokes dating from the mid-seventeenth century. A large number of the jokes contained in the collection deal with struggles between men and women. This correlation would explain the anecdotal character of the images. Many of them are prints with inscriptions that further explain and ridicule the actions of the portrayed characters. In fact, the theme eventually develops into a popular comic strip by the end of the seventeenth century.¹⁶

Before beginning an analysis of the development of this theme in art, however, it is essential to have an understanding of the position of women in Netherlandish culture.¹⁷ Of importance to this analysis is a consideration of the anthropological study of humor that clearly demonstrates how a joke can only be perceived when it corresponds to the social experience of the audience.¹⁸ How, for example, should these images be understood in a culture where, increasingly, women were actually taking on male roles and were sometimes celebrated for that power? In particular, women in Dutch society of the Golden Age were gaining recognition, prominence, and power in numerous ways. The powerful position enjoyed by women in the Dutch Republic was not a status suddenly bestowed upon them in the seventeenth century. It was a product of gradual cultural change during previous centuries in the Netherlands, in which women began to assert themselves. During the fifteenth

¹⁶ By the end of the seventeenth century, the subjugated male character of these images, "John the Washer" (or the man who does female chores), had become so popular, he was the star of several comic strip versions of the theme in print. This, however, was the last phase in the development of the overbearing woman theme in art. By this point in time the theme had almost disappeared in both prints and paintings. This was related to changing social attitudes regarding women, power, and the battle of the sexes. For more on this relationship and development, see Martha Moffitt Peacock, "Proverbial Reframing—Rebuking and Revering Women in Trousers," *Journal of the Walters Art Gallery* 57 (1999): 13–34.

¹⁷ For studies on the development of the "Power of Women" *topos*, see Peacock, "Proverbial Reframing."

¹⁸ Mary Douglas, *Implicit Meanings: Essays in Anthropology* (London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975).

and sixteenth centuries, women had already begun to interject themselves into the domain of men. They began to receive education and they became involved in trade and the running of businesses.¹⁹

In addition, there are numerous accounts of awe-struck travelers who relate anecdotes of the seeming role reversals between men and women in this society. Many of these accounts asserted that women dominated their husbands, were well educated, and were adept in the transaction of business. Although the letters and journals of travelers must be read with a certain amount of caution due to national stereotypes, even a cursory look at this evidence reveals a strong agreement regarding the power of Netherlandish women as related in personal anecdotal evidence. As the housewife's power increased during the sixteenth century, she began to be viewed by some foreigners as overbearing and shrewish. Several travelers to the Netherlands were shocked and dismayed at the freedoms enjoyed by Dutch women, and they frequently censured the wife's dominance over her husband. As early as 1567, Ludovico Guicciardini describes the tyranny of the Netherlandish housewife as follows:

The Women governe all, both within the doores
and without, and make all bargaines, which
joyned with the naturaall desire that Women have
to beare rule, maketh them too too imperious
and troublesome.²⁰

Thus, as has been noted by a few scholars, indictments against female tyranny in literature and art begin to appear more frequently around the mid-sixteenth century in the Netherlands. Gibson suggests that images of "Bad Griet," or the shrewish woman, might relate to the independence of Netherlandish women at this time and to the reality of many female rulers during the sixteenth century.²¹ Furthermore, in relation to the literature of the era, Herman Pleij notes the growing popularity of farces during the sixteenth century that use the stereotype of the angry housewife who abuses her weak husband. He also cites the independence of Netherlandish women as a stimulus for this phenomenon.²² Thus,

¹⁹ Herman Pleij, "Wie wordt er bang voor het boze wijf," *De Revisor* 4.6 (1977): 38–42; see also Isabella van Eeghen, "Haes paradijs en de uitdraagsters," *Jaarboek voor Vrouwengeschiedenis* 8 (1987): 125–33.

²⁰ Ludovico Guicciardini, *The Description of the Low Countreys* (Amsterdam: Theatrum Orbis Terrarum; Norwood, NJ: Walter J. Johnson, 1976), 71.

²¹ Walter Gibson, "Bruegel, Dulle Griet, and Sexist Politics in the Sixteenth Century," *Pieter Bruegel und seine Welt: ein Colloquium veranstaltet vom Kunsthistorischen Institut der Freien Universität Berlin und dem Kupferstichkabinett der Staatlichen Museen Stiftung preussischer Kulturbesitz am 13. und 14. November 1975*, ed. Otto von Simson and Matthias Winner (Berlin: Mann Verlag, 1979), 9–15.

²² Herman Pleij, "Boze wijf," 38–42; Lene Dresen-Coenders suggests that images of overbearing women are a reflection of women's loss of power since the late Middle Ages in "De strijd om de

both the visual and literary humor of the era begins to evidence an increasing male concern regarding female power. The comedic aspects of these artifacts appear to be coping strategies used to ameliorate the anxiety of these “unnatural” developments.²³ One of the most popular “Power of Women” themes was the so-called “*Strijd om de Broek*” or “Battle for the Trousers.” This theme, more than any other, became a well-known metaphor for the shrewish, overbearing woman. While the *topos* can be found in both art and literature during the Middle Ages, visual representations of the theme begin to occur in abundance during the second half of the sixteenth century. The trousers had long been considered a strictly male form of clothing and thus became a symbol of men generally, just as the skirt represented the female. The expression “*De broek aanhebben*” (to have the trousers on) or “*De broek dragen*” (to wear the pants) referred to a person’s status as master in the house. A woman who wore trousers not only signaled that she had taken on male attributes, but also that she had usurped the powers and privileges of her husband.²⁴ In addition to its indictment of women, the theme also emphasizes the humiliation of the weak husband who cannot rule his wife.

An early example of the theme is found in an anonymous print dated 1555 (Fig. 1). Seated at the right of the composition is a formidable-looking wife who glares down scornfully at her kneeling husband. Having already won the battle for her husband’s trousers, she further threatens him with an upraised fist. In addition to indicating her threats, this last motif became a common visual pun on the expression “*manshand boven*” (man’s upper hand). This popular expression advocated the husband’s mastery over the wife, and it was commonly used to put forward the proper authority of the man in the home.²⁵ The miserable, cowering husband is completely subjected to her power as he kneels at his wife’s feet. His humiliation is emphasized by the way he is forced both to grovel at her feet and to dress her in his trousers. Moreover, his exposed genitalia add to his ridiculous appearance and also leave no doubt as to the fact that they are his trousers which she has won. Obediently yielding his trousers, however, is not enough: he must

broek,” *De Revisor* 4.6 (1977): 29–37; Lene Dresen-Coenders, “De heks als duivelsboel,” *Tussen heks en heilige: Het vrouwbeeld op de drempel van de moderne tijd, 15de/16de eeuw*, ed. Petty Bange and Ellen Muller (Nijmegen: SUN, Nijmeegs Museum “Commanderie van Sint-Jan”, 1985), 59–82; Lene Dresen-Coenders, “De machtsbalans tussen man en vrouw in het vroeg-moderne gezin,” *Vijf eeuwen gezinsleven: liefde, huwelijk en opvoeding in Nederland*, ed. Harry Peeters, Lene Dresen-Coenders, Ton Brandenbarg (Nijmegen: SUN, 1988), 57–98.

²³ Dekker concludes that while humor during the medieval era was often aggressive, during the seventeenth century it instead “acquired a more modern social function of facilitating social intercourse and easing tensions,” *Humour in Dutch Culture*, 146.

²⁴ FrederikA. Stoett, *Nederlandsche spreekwoorden, spreekwijzen, uitdrukkingen en gezegden*, vol. 1 (Zutphen: W. J. Thieme, 1923), 140–41.

²⁵ Alfons de Cock, *Spreekwoorden en zegswijzen over de vrouwen, de liefde, en het huwelijk* (Ghent: Boekdrukkers- en Uitgevershuis Ad. Hoste, 1911), 60.

also be victim to her violent blows. Further humiliating the husband is his placement amidst all the instruments of domesticity, such as the spools and winder, the brooms, the pot cooking over the fire and the bowl and spoon which suggest that he has taken over all the wife's domestic chores. The male taking-on of female chores was another indication of a henpecked husband. His wife has already become the man of the house, to judge not only by her newly-won male apparel and dominant position over her husband, but also by the removal of her apron that she has thrown to the floor.

Additional evidence of her power is conveyed by the placement of the familiar symbol of wifely authority—the distaff—at the foot of the bed. It stands out boldly as a signification of who rules in this marriage. The distaff became a symbol for women themselves, as it was their most familiar tool.²⁶ It also becomes a familiar weapon in the visual arts for women in their battle against men. From the late Middle Ages on, distaffs had been associated with witches and were used by women as weapons in various types of “Battles of the Sexes.”²⁷ As late as the seventeenth century, the distaff was still used as a metaphor for women generally and also at times more specifically for overbearing females. It is used as such in a proverbial expression found in Jacob Cats's *Regels voor de Huys-houdinge in Spreucken, Spreek-woorden, en Gedichten* (Rules for Households in Sayings, Proverbs, and Poems) (1665): “Alwaer de spin-rock dwingt het sweert, / er staet het qualick met den weert”²⁸ (Wherever the distaff dominates the sword, / There things are going badly for the head of the household).

The familiar comedic figure of the fool enters through the open doorway and points accusingly at the husband. He “tells” the joke of the image through this gesture and through the mocking inscription above: “Men vint ter werlt ghen meer der Gecken / Dan die haer Wijfs die Broeck antrecken” (One finds in the world no greater fool / Than he who helps his wife put on the pants.) Above the wife are her words:

²⁶ Matthias de Vries and Lammert A. te Winkel, *Het Woordenboek der Nederlandsche taal*, vol. 14 (The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1882-), 2846.

²⁷ Such a purpose for the distaff is reiterated in one of Erasmus's *Colloquia* in which two friends, Eulalia and Xantippe, have a discussion about their husbands. Xantippe describes how her husband comes home drunk and beats her. Eulalia exclaims, “A new sort of shield! You should have used your distaff for a lance,” *The Colloquies of Erasmus*, trans. Craig R. Thompson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 117. Further evil was connected with the distaff due to its purported use by witches. In a print by Durer, a truly evil looking witch astride a goat carries her distaff as if it is a scepter—a gesture which signifies her evil female power (in the collection of the Museum Boymans van Beuningen, Rotterdam).

²⁸ Jacob Cats, *Alle de werken*, vol. 1 (Amsterdam: Daniel van den Dalen, Francois Halma, and the widow of A. van Someren; Utrecht: J. and Wilhem vande Water, 1700), 601.

Treect ons an den Broeck mit moeden vry
 Want se is my / soe guet als dy
 Ende swijcht al stil/ghi schuym van Boeuen
 Oft Jan ghy sult die Vuysten proeuen.

[Put on us the pants without hesitation
 Because they are mine, as much as yours
 And shut your mouth, you scum of scoundrels
 Or, Jan, you shall feel these fists.]

And below the husband is his plea: "Och Wijf, u die Broeck an toe trecken doe ick geeren / Mer den Voerbroeck can ick soe qualick ontberen" (Oh wife, I desire to put the pants on you / But I cannot really do without the codpiece).

The visual jokes and puns, the caricatures, the shocking incongruity of the exaggerated behavior, the slapstick comedy of the implied violence, the farcical description of the everyday scene, and the presence of the comedian fool all contribute to the humorous entertainment of the print. And like many types of humor, the print is used as a corrective to "unnatural" and foolish behavior. Clearly, the ethos of the time was that men who allow their wives to wear the pants are also to blame for this household predicament. Men were advised to keep their wives under control and to teach them proper humility. In a cultural milieu where female power was on the rise, such images allowed men to laugh at the reality of that threat while also finding relief in the humorous incongruity of this role reversal. Additionally, the male viewer could derive a sense of superiority via the imaging of a weak man who had lost control of his wife in what was to become a seemingly familiar usurpation of patriarchal authority.

While there was certainly anxiety regarding violent women expressed in the many negative images of women beating and scolding their spouses, even more ludicrous were scenes dealing with a woman's tyranny. While the idea of enslaving a man through marriage occurs as early as the late fourteenth century in Netherlandish literature and art, the *topos* became so popular during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries that it rivaled that of the Battle for the Trousers. Even more than the Battle for the Trousers theme, it came to represent the notion of the "*Verkeerde Wereld*" (the world turned upside down). Indeed, the moral of most literary and visual works dealing with the theme is that when men were forced by domineering wives to take on female tasks such as gathering eggs, cooking, winding, spinning, cleaning house, and caring for children, such actions would result in complete chaos. The picturing of men engaged in female chores thus ridicules such role reversal.

Due to its reliance on a separation of male-female roles, the theme of the forcing of female chores was sometimes accompanied by the description of a strict division of male and female tasks. Such delineations also contained a warning to

men and women against ignoring these prescribed gender boundaries. The task with the longest history of being unnaturally forced upon weak husbands was that of spinning. The theme probably has its roots in the myth of Hercules and Omphale. Hercules, for love of Omphale, submits himself to the female task of spinning. As has already been noted, distaffs were frequently used as metaphors for women themselves and they became particularly associated with female dominance in the marriage. Men with distaffs, winders, and spindles, therefore became common indicators of henpecked husbands. In this tradition is a print by Jan Wierix after Pieter Bruegel the Elder (1568–1569), which forms one of a series illustrating Netherlandish proverbs (Fig. 2).

The image is of a virago who makes her husband wear an apron and be the woman of the house. The irascibility of the wife is clearly suggested by her pose, and the scorn on her caricatured face implies the disdain felt for her husband who sits meekly before her.

As with many of the images, she is placed in a position over him, and the forceful way in which she presses toward him with hands on hips leaves no doubt as to her shrewish nature. With his eyes meekly lowered, the husband sits with his hands folded in the woman's apron that he wears. The winders that hang above the husband indicate that he is forced to do the woman's work in the house. Also suggestive of this is the manner in which the wife stands on her distaff, which, as the French inscription informs us, she refuses to use: "*Femme qui tanse sans raison / Ne fait quenuij a la maison*" (A wife who scolds without reason / Does not use the distaff in the house).

The ape, peering out from behind the hearth, is a common motif emphasizing the folly of human behavior; here it is the absurdity of a wife as master and her husband as slave. In addition, two other animals add to the significance of the pictured activity. The husband's lowered gaze directs our attention to the cackling hen at his feet. Its upraised beak is directed toward the man, who receives the scorn of both the woman and hen. Behind the dominating hen stands her mate, the rooster, whose lowered head reminds us of the henpecked husband. These animals also refer to the two proverbs that encircle the scene:

Een leeckende dack / ende een roockende schouwe,
Ja daer de simme aenden heijrt sit en siet,
Een craijende hinne / een kijfachtige vrouwe,
Is ongheluck in huijs / ja quellinghe en verdriet.

[A roof that leaks/and a smoking chimney,
yes, there the monkey sits on the hearth and looks,
a crowing hen/a quarrelsome wife,
is misfortune in the house/yes torment and grief.]

As with the Battle for the Trousers theme, the exaggerated caricatures and surprising actions of the figures mock this unnatural behavior and endow the male viewer with a position of derisive superiority. Here the monkey plays the role of the previous fool—that is, pointing out the joke and comedy in the depicted antics. Moreover, it is significant that the image belongs to a whole series of prints that similarly depict ridiculous proverbs. Proverbs had been an aspect of the humor tradition since ancient times.²⁹ It provided a type of riddle for the audience to discover the punch line. In this humorous juxtaposition of puzzling metaphors, the viewer is meant to uncover a variety of puns from the trouserless husband to the connection with hens. The name given to a henpecked husband was *hennetaster* (hen groper), as another female task forced on men was the feeling of hens for their eggs. Thus, once again the viewer could enjoy the superiority of solving the proverbial riddle, and the male viewer in particular could laugh at the absurd weakness of the husband and also disparage overbearing females.

This tradition of including the Battle for the Trousers in collections of comic proverbs continues into the seventeenth century. In fact, one such print carries the general title “*AFBEELDING HOE SEVEN WYVEN VECHTEN OM EEN MANS BROEK ENDE HOE DE VROU DE BROEK AEN TRECHT EN DE MAN DEN ROCK*” (REPRESENTATION OF HOW SEVEN WIVES FIGHT OVER A MAN’S PANTS AND HOW THE WOMAN PUTS ON THE PANTS AND THE MAN THE SKIRT). One of the scenes portrays seven women battling over a pair of trousers and another scene shows a woman, identified as “Bad Griet,” putting on the trousers while her husband puts on the skirt. It is significant, therefore, to see how enduring these comic traditions were and how certain puns became even more popular into the seventeenth century when the fear of female power became an increasingly uneasy threat.

While it is clear that women were already making significant gains in Netherlandish society prior to the Dutch Golden Age, female power and nervous reactions to it became even more pronounced after the successful Revolt against Spain and the establishment of the new Republic. This is certainly due in part to the fact that several significant and consequential heroines emerged during this time. Dutch heroines were distinctive in many ways. First, several cities of the newly-forming Republic proclaimed and mythologized the brave deeds of one or more of their female citizenry. So, rather than producing a singularly-extraordinary heroine, the Dutch Revolution generated a tradition that allowed for the much more common assimilation of heroic capabilities by women. Another unusual feature of the Dutch heroine tradition is the manner in which these women achieved their legendary status. Unlike the more familiar self-sacrificing

²⁹ Roeckelein, *Humor*, 90–91. Gibson also discusses the proverb tradition as humor throughout *Laughter*.

heroines of the past, most of these women gained fame through courageous struggle against the Spanish enemy. Indeed, they purportedly competed with, and at times surpassed, their male compatriots in terms of strength and bravery. Thus, the opportunity for women to adopt traditionally male roles and characteristics was greatly enhanced. Finally, a further distinctive feature of these heroines was their commoner status; they were not royal or even of the nobility, but were simply ordinary burgher women.

After the Revolt, the new Republic had little to unite the various provinces except for their shared hatred and distrust of both Spain and the Catholic Church. As the Republic endeavored to define itself and create a unified culture, there were a number of competing discourses all clamoring for recognition. Some of the most significant and enduring discourses to arise were related to gender and more specifically to the appropriate roles for women in this new society. By this point in time, according to visual and written accounts, women had participated in everything from iconoclastic riots to outright struggles with Spanish soldiers for many years. Therefore, as the society began looking for patriotic symbols to unite the new Republic in its continued resistance to Spain, the deeds of several heroines received a great amount of public attention. The significant praise in images and texts extended to these women led to a redefining of women's roles and character that was to have lasting import for women of the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic.

In relation to the tradition of celebrating these women of the Golden Age, it is essential to introduce the most significant catalog of good women published in the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic. Johan van Beverwijck's *Van de uitnementheyt des vrouwelicken geslachts* (On the Excellence of the Female Sex) defends the courage, abilities, and intelligence of women and even argues that women are superior to men. Van Beverwijck's positive text on women, published twice during the seventeenth century in 1639 and 1643, incorporated many of his famous female contemporaries in the form of descriptions, as well as contributed poems and eulogies. In this way, the text is rather distinctive compared to most such texts published elsewhere. Many of the anecdotes and histories van Beverwijck compiles must have been gathered via routine discussions within Dutch society.

Significantly, for an introduction to the topic of heroines, van Beverwijck eulogizes many Dutch female soldiers in his text and compares their bravery to that of men. Indeed, in the later edition he devotes an entire section of his text to their courageous deeds. The impact of this discussion, combined with other histories, was tremendous. By the time Petrus van Gelre wrote his *Vrouwen-lof* (Praise of Women) in 1646, he asserted that gallant soldiering had been the nature

of women for so long in the Netherlands, it no longer seemed unnatural.³⁰ This heroine discourse directly contradicted normative concepts of women's roles and must have profoundly influenced public perceptions of women's character and capabilities. In art, by usurping the visual tradition of the male warrior, images of heroines also posed a challenge to a strict binary system of gender roles and permanently altered this society's patriarchal discourse.

The most celebrated heroine to emerge from the Dutch Revolt against Spain was Kenau Simons Hasselaer. In fact she is one of the most famous patriots of the Revolt, male or female. Her bravery during the siege of Haarlem was lauded and expanded upon throughout the seventeenth century. In histories and prints she was eventually assigned the rank of captain and was described as having led 300 women into battle. She was compared to the biblical Judith and was credited with saving her people. In art she is depicted with mannish features, presented in typical male poses, and draped with manly weapons. Moreover, her bravery was constantly equated with heroes of the Revolt.³¹

Another famous heroine, Trijn van Leemput of Utrecht, was also lauded in texts and images for her brave deeds against the Spanish tyrant. In particular, she is credited with gathering the women of the city to destroy the Spanish castle Vreedenberg. In an illustration from van Beverwijk's text, for example, she is shown carrying a flag and leading a female battalion armed with domestic and farm tools to destroy the castle in the background (Fig. 3). In addition to exalting the deeds of these women, van Beverwijk includes stories of several other brave women of the Revolt. For example, he describes and illustrates the brave accomplishments of the women of Amsterdam.³² He writes that having taken the city of Haarlem, the victorious Spanish troops turned to Amsterdam only to be met by more shooting. The women of Amsterdam fought bravely alongside the men and on their own brought artillery to a certain elevation in the city, from which they bombarded the Spanish. After a long battle, the Spanish acknowledged defeat and fled to the ports.

Another woman, according to van Beverwijk, received acclaim in 1587 after the surrender of the Prince of Parma. When the army came to Dordrecht, it was

³⁰ Petrus van Gelre, *Vrouwen-lof: aen me-juffrouw, me-iuffrouw*, C. K. (Leiden: William Christiaens vander Boxe, 1646).

³¹ There are three excellent sources on the biography of, and history over, Hasselaer, see J. van de Capelle, *Belangrijke stukken voor geschied- en oudeidkunde: zijnde bijlagen en aantekeningen betrekkelijk het beleg en de verdediging van Haarlem in 1572 en 1573* (Schoonhoven: Van Nooten, 1844); Cornelius Ekama, *Beleg en verdediging van Haarlem in 1572 en 1573* (Haarlem: Kruseman, 1872); Gerda H. Kurtz, *Kenu Symons dochter van Haerlem* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1956); Els Kloek, *Kenau: De heldhaftige zakenvrouw uit Haarlem (1526–1588)* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2001).

³² Johan van Beverwijk, *Van de uitnemenheit des vrouwelicken geslachts: verciert met historyen, ende kopere platen*, vol. 2 (Dordrecht Esch, 1643), 357–58.

discovered that one of the soldiers was a woman. All were greatly astonished that for two years she had served as a famous soldier.³³ Van Beverwijk mentions that a similar case originated in Gelderlandt in 1589. After the battle was finished, a woman was found among the dead. Van Beverwijk states that she had fought for the Republic for many years and that she had performed many famous deeds.³⁴

Petrus De Lange also discusses Hasselaer and other brave women soldiers in his text, *Batavis Romeyn* 1661. In this history, De Lange purports to list all the heroic deeds done in Holland and Zeeland from 1492 to 1661. He includes several engraved portraits of the various Dutch heroes in his text—the first is of William of Orange and the second is a monumental image of Hasselaer. Another woman, Margarita, he dubs a “Dutch Amazon” and describes how she fought fearlessly in a number of early seventeenth-century battles at Oostende, Groeningen, and Steenwijck. She also dressed in men’s clothes and used a spear and musket. He writes that a song was composed about her to inspire the bravery of other young women.³⁵

Another female soldier described by de Lange who took on a male disguise was Trijntje Symons. Once again he compares her heroic deeds to Greek and Latin descriptions of the Amazons. He records that she fought during the 1620s, dressed as a man, learned to use weapons, and changed her name to Symon Poort. Symons served so gallantly as a soldier that she gained much fame and received a celebrated burial.³⁶ Finally, de Lange describes the brave deeds of two women, Joanna Pieters and Anna Jans, who fought against the English during the 1650s. These two women went to sea and preferred an honorable death to surrender. He once again compares their fearlessness to the Amazons, as well as to the Batavian heroines of antiquity.³⁷

These later examples of women warriors are notable; inspired by their revolutionary predecessors, they too wanted to take on traditional male soldiering roles to protect the Fatherland. Some, however, took this daring to a new level by actually disguising as men and training as fighters. Such anecdotes are reflected in the 1989 research of Rudolf Dekker and Lotte van de Pol.³⁸ Their investigations yielded a significant number of cases in which women dressed as males and enlisted as sailors and soldiers during the seventeenth and early eighteenth

³³ Ibid., 2:358.

³⁴ Ibid., 3:51.

³⁵ Petrus de Lange, *Batavise Romeyn; ofte alle de voornaemste heldendaden... in veld en zeeslagen... by de Hollanders en Zeeuwen verricht, zedert den iare 1492 tot 1661*, (Amsterdam: Willem van Beaumont, boeckverkooper, 1661), 103.

³⁶ Ibid., 174–75.

³⁷ Ibid., 395–96.

³⁸ Rudolf M. Dekker and Lotte C. van de Pol, *The Tradition of Female Transvestism in Early Modern Europe*, trans. Judy Marcure and Lotte C. van de Pol (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989).

centuries in the Netherlands. Furthermore, they presume that the number of instances discovered only represents a small portion of actual cases in which women were donning the trousers. While the motivations of these women were mixed, many of them claimed patriotic justifications and expressed a desire for glory. Certainly, the contesting opinions regarding female soldiers, particularly those that eulogized the patriotic foremothers of the Revolt, must have inspired many women to take on these male roles. As was the case with Hasselaer and her army, these women were called Amazons by their contemporaries and some were even received at court and rewarded by the monarchy. While there were also negative reactions to women soldiers, this phenomenon certainly inspired in these later cross-dressing heroines a greater degree of boldness that provided opportunity to compete with men in their traditional roles. It also publicly raised questions regarding the nature and roles of women.

Thus, there was a considerable amount of public attention devoted to women who were actually, as well as metaphorically, wearing the trousers. Texts and images that celebrated the deeds of heroic women significantly affected public perceptions of women's capabilities to take on what were deemed to be male characteristics and roles. Such discourses vehemently thrust this discussion over women and their abilities into the public sphere. It is clear that for many authors, the heroines of the Revolt were to be admired and praised. For van Beverwijk, de Lange, and van Gelre in particular, women's courage was considered as great as, or even surpassing, that of men. Characteristics such as bravery, fortitude, leadership, patriotism, loyalty, strength, and skill were no longer seen as being exclusive to men. In addition, for some of these artists and authors, the brave female soldier was not such an unusual phenomenon. It was, therefore, the typical nature of the Dutch heroine that separated her from such atypical examples in other societies.

As mentioned, texts and images emphasized the fact that the most notable heroines were neither royalty nor nobility, but were almost exclusively ordinary burgher women. Because the heroines are represented as contemporary women leading other females in the protection of their cities, surely other Dutch women would relate to them as individuals like themselves. This was important for Dutch women of the seventeenth century in that they obviously developed a kinship with these heroines. In other words, the heroines' ability to go beyond the traditional bounds of their sex, to act aggressively, and to achieve public attention and fame affected all women and made these types of opportunities seem possible for other burgher women. Importantly, this meant that women generally, not just women warriors, could be ascribed admirable traits previously considered to be uniquely male. And such was, of course, the purpose of texts like those by van Beverwijk and van Gelre.

Certainly the immediate and prolific attention being given at home and abroad to these heroines gave women from the outset of the Republic a stronger position from which to help shape future gender status and roles. Their deeds were recounted and enlarged upon in the many histories of the Revolt that appeared during the seventeenth century. These legends were also performed in patriotic dramas of the era. In particular, the many prints that glorified the patriotism and bravery of these women and which were easily distributed must have been generally power-engendering for future Dutch women. By usurping the visual tradition of the male warrior, these images posed a challenge to a strict binary gender division. Specifically, the manly portrayal of the women and the inscriptions equating their bravery and fortitude to that of men must have influenced public perceptions of women's ability to engage in other male pursuits, participate in the public sphere, and gain public reputations. Indeed, it was not only heroines who were praised for their male pursuits. In van Beverwijk's text, he lauds women who gained public adulation through their scholarly, artistic, poetic, and musical accomplishments. The portrayals of and discussions referencing these women mimicked those used in regard of the heroines. All such *vrouwen lof* or praise of women who took on male pursuits was quite revolutionary in its view of women as equal to the capabilities of men. Such recognition clearly established a discourse that significantly controverted the prevailing patriarchal hegemony.

It is likely, therefore, that the power already exercised by women prior to the Revolt positioned them to participate so unusually and vigorously in the Revolt. Furthermore, because the women fought so bravely and achieved such fame, their examples certainly had fortunate consequences for their gender. As a result, the vigorous discourses emanating from the Revolt had a lasting influence on female power within Dutch society. Even negative discourses surrounding warring, aggressive women resulted in focusing significant attention on the phenomenon. One is particularly tempted to ask what benefits these images provided for the female gaze. They gave her a view of her position in this new society as at least somewhat comparable to men in ability and skill. By usurping the visual tradition of the male warrior, these images posed a challenge to a strict binary system and stirred up the cacophonous gender trouble witnessed in *Power of Women* prints. Many of the inscriptions claimed that these women were manlier than the men in terms of bravery in defense of home and Fatherland. Thus maleness, as a strict category, was deconstructed and women were able to construct new gender roles within this changed cultural framework. It is clear then that the Dutch Republic was a society in which women did have power to take on male roles and to contest the hegemonic discourse with a discourse of their own. It was a self-confident assertion greatly born out of the images that revered the women of the Revolt. This discussion glorified the patriotic deeds of their foremothers,

challenged patriarchal definitions of women's roles, and altered public perceptions of women's character and capabilities.

The positive championing of women had obviously begun to have an impact on male perceptions of female power, even when the individual found such a reversal of traditional gender roles to be both unnatural and incongruous. It was a promotion that continued throughout the seventeenth century, encouraging women to take up male pursuits and inviting praise for their gender in both art and literature. Never before in the history of western civilization had so much attention been given to visual and textual expositions on contemporary and ordinary women. While many features of Dutch culture have been said to influence this phenomenon, I would assert that it is due primarily to the discourse first initiated at the inception of independence when gender and the new Republic first intersected. It was a discourse that allowed for the questioning of tradition in many aspects, but, as has been demonstrated with this discussion, it specifically challenged traditional social constructions of gender. The contributions to this discourse, as part of popular culture, were able to effect societal change, making possible the types of legal, educational, economic, cultural, and social precedents in favor of women that were established and continued throughout the seventeenth century.

Other explanations have also been offered to explain the increasing power obtained by women before and during the Golden Age of the Dutch Republic. Most center on societal changes entailed by the early development of an urban middle class in the Netherlands that contributed to a greater independence for women. Also, women were putting off marriage to a later age, working in the public sphere, and marrying younger men, which led to a greater equality between spouses.³⁹

Of further importance is the development of the nuclear family in relation to the new middle class. It is asserted that this change made the woman more of an equal, rather than subordinate, partner in marriage. An increased emphasis on maintaining a harmonious and orderly family life was incompatible with a husband's tyrannizing his wife. A gradual change regarding the "*tuchtigingsrecht*" (the right of the husband to chastise his wife physically) also exemplifies the changed power relationship between man and wife. Historians note that from the sixteenth century on through the seventeenth century, physical violence against wives was increasingly discouraged by moralists and restricted by law.⁴⁰

³⁹ John Hajnal, "European Marriage Patterns in Perspective," *Population in History; Essays in Historical Demography*, ed. David Victor Glass and David Edward Charles Eversley (London: Edward Arnold Publishers, 1965), 101-41.

⁴⁰ This is discussed in Wilma van Engeldorp Gastelaars, "Ik Sal U Smiten op Uwen Tant: Geweld tussen man en vrouw in laatmiddeleeuwse kluchten," Ph. D. dissertation, Universiteit van

Regarding the seventeenth century specifically, the opinions and actual administration of judges belies the existence of a patriarchal authority, even though the moralists of the day strongly proclaimed that such existed. Although a husband, for example, had the right to demand the return of a wife who had left him, this right was rarely invoked.

Other historians have demonstrated that women in the Dutch Republic enjoyed more rights than women elsewhere in Europe. The wife, for example, could seek justice, under certain circumstances, if her husband beat her. In the case of a husband who had committed adultery and contracted venereal disease, the wife could appeal to church authorities for either a separation of beds or an annulment. Women could also act as regentesses for various charitable institutions such as hospitals and old age homes. Furthermore, as women had the right to make commercial contracts, they could more easily engage in business. Other privileges of women included the singing of psalms and sharing of pews with men. Dutch wives also had the right to inherit property, and they could own property while their husbands were alive. In addition, when the husband's bad judgment in business matters threatened to bring the family to ruin, the wife could appeal to the law.⁴¹ Also, sociologists have uncovered a comparatively large number of households headed by single females in Holland, which further indicates a more independent female presence in the society.⁴²

Comments by foreigners on the power of Dutch women increase during the Golden Age. Fynes Moryson, an English traveler who visited the Netherlands during the last decade of the sixteenth century, was amazed by the freedoms enjoyed by Dutch women. He asserted that girls practiced dominance over males,

Amsterdam, 1984, 7–8; see also Donald Haks, *Huwelijk en gezin in Holland in de 17de en 18de Eeuw: processtukken en moralisten over aspecten van het laat 17de- en 18de-eeuwse gezinsleven* (Assen: Van Gorcum's Historische Bibliotheek, 1982), 141–57.

⁴¹ Simon Schama, "Wives and Wantons: Versions of Womanhood in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Art," *The Oxford Art Journal* 3.1 (April 1980): 5–13; and Simon Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches* (New York: Knopf, 1987), 384–91; Alice Carter, "Marriage Counseling in the Early Seventeenth Century: England and the Netherlands Compared," *Ten Studies in Anglo-Dutch Relations*, ed. Jan A. van Dorsten (Leiden: Published for the Sir Thomas Browne Institute, at the University Press; London: Oxford University Press 1974), 94–127.

⁴² Ad M. van der Woude, "Variations in the Size and Structure of the Household in the United Provinces of the Netherlands in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," *Household and Family in Past Time; Comparative Studies in the Size and Structure of the Domestic Group over the Last Three Centuries in England, France, Serbia, Japan and Colonial North America, With Further Materials from Western Europe*, ed. Peter Laslett and Richard Wall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 299–318.

"from the first use of speech, as if they were borne to rule over the malles."⁴³ He surmised that the overbearing wife arose from the overbearing young girl:

Nothing is more frequent, then for little girles
to insult over their brothers much bigger then they,
reproving their doings, and calling them great lubbers,
whereof when I talked with some schollers my
companions, as a fashion seeming strange to mee,
they were so farre from wondering thereat, as they
told me, it was a common thing for Wives to drive
their Husbands and their friends out of the doores
with scolding, as if they consumed the goods
wherein they had a property with their Husbands.
I should be too credulous, if I should thinke all
Families to be sicke of this disease; and I must
confesse, that in few other Nations all Families
are altogether free from like accidents: but I
may boldly say, that the Women of these parts,
are above all other truly taxed with this unnatural
domineering over their Husbands.⁴⁴

Moryson further attributes this female domination to their large numbers:

Agayne it is generally obserued that as the wemen
of these Provinces overtops the men in number (which
I formerly shewed) so they commonly rule theire
famylyes. In the morning they giue theire husbandes
drincking mony in their purses, who goe abroade
to be merry where they list, leaving theire wyues to
keepe the shop and sell all things.⁴⁵

The consequences of this excessive drinking, according to Moryson, were that the men were unable to father more males. In addition, he claimed that the Dutch women would commonly remain unmarried until a later age at which time they would marry younger men, which supposedly made the reproduction of females more certain. Such marriages also kept women in control:

⁴³ Fynes Moryson, *Shakespeare's Europe: A Survey of the Condition of Europe at the End of the 16th Century, Being Unpublished Chapters of Fynes Moryson's Itinerary (1617)*, ed. Charles Hughes, 2d ed. (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1967), 382.

⁴⁴ Moryson, *An Itinerary: Containing His Ten Yeeres Travell Through the Twelve Dominions of Germany, Bohmerland, Sweitzerland, Netherland, Denmarke, Poland, Italy, Turkey, France, England, Scotland & Ireland*, vol. 4 (Glasgow: James MacLehose and Sons, 1908), 469.

⁴⁵ Moryson, *Shakespeare's Europe*, 382.

. . . the watery Provinces breed flegmaticke humors, which together with the mens excessive drinking, may disable them to beget Males; or that the Women (as I have heard some Hollanders confesse) not easily finding a Husband, in respect of this disparity of the Sexes in number, commonly live unmarried till they be thirty yeeres old, and as commonly take Husbands of twenty yeeres age, which must needs make the Women more powerfull in generation. And the Women not onely take young men to their Husbands, but those also which are most simple and tractable: so as by the foresaid privilege of Wives to dispose goods by their last will, and by the contracts in respect of their Dowry, (which to the same end use to be warily drawne,) they keepe their Husbands in a kind of awe, and almost alone, without their Husbands intermedling, not onely keepe their shops at home, but exercise trafficke abroad.⁴⁶

Moryson argued that the dominance of females not only led to a usurpation of men's roles by women, it also forced female tasks upon the men. He tells of such incidents in the city of Leiden: "I haue seene men milke Cowes, and carry the milke in two payles fastned to a wooden yoke before them, which they wore about their neckes."⁴⁷ Furthermore, this domination led to violence:

It is no rare thing for blowes to happen betweene man and wife, and I credibly heard that they have slight punishments for that fault, and my selfe did heare the Crier summon a man to answer the beating of his wife before a Magistrate.⁴⁸

Such comments by foreigners continue in the seventeenth century. Jean Nicolaes de Parival, writing in 1651, also discusses the freedom of Dutch housewives that he witnessed as a visitor to the Netherlands. He asserts that this was the cause of violence between the spouses, thus disrupting the neighborhood:

Elles ne jouissent pas moins que leurs maris de la liberte,
& ce feroit un crime inexpriable que de les batter.
I'ay ouy raconteur plusieurs fois, que si un home avoit battu sa femme,

⁴⁶ Moryson, *Itinerary*, 469.

⁴⁷ Moryson, *Shakespeare's Europe*, 382–83.

⁴⁸ Moryson, *Itinerary*, 468.

& que cela vint a la connoissance des voisin, il payeroit un Iambon
d'amende,
& la femme pour avoir frappe son mari, deux.

[They enjoy as much freedom as their husbands.
And this causes the unforgiveable crime of beating.
I have heard recounted many times, that if a man
has beaten his wife, and the neighbors find out,
he has to amend for his deed by paying with a ham.
And if the wife strikes her husband, she has to pay two.]⁴⁹

Furthermore, numerous comments by foreigners from the seventeenth century report on the unusual and adept nature of Dutch women in business. They report that the women are well educated in both languages and business.⁵⁰

Another frequently-cited cause for the dominance of Dutch women is the great freedom they enjoyed under the law. Moryson specifically discusses the wife's rights of inheritance:

And the wife that brought a dowry, be her husband
growne never so rich by his trade, may when shee
dies give, not only her dowry, but halfe her husbands
goods gotten in marriage, to her owne Kinsmen after
his death, if shee have no children by him; and if
she brought no dowry, yet she hath the same right to
dispose of halfe her husbands goods gotten in mariage,
and (as is supposed) by their mutuall labor.⁵¹

Finally, Sir John Reresby, an English visitor to the Netherlands in 1654, asserts that all of these freedoms enjoyed by Dutch women under the law make them both shrewish and overbearing:

The wives mostly wear the breeches, and insult over
their husbands with words upon easy occasion, being
much favoured by the laws of the country, which
inflict punishments upon those that misuse their
wives, and allowing the women not only to take back,
upon the death of the husband, the portion they
brought him, but also half of the estate or property

⁴⁹ Jean Nicolaes de Parival, *Les delices de la Hollande. Œuvre panegirique, avec un traité du gouvernement, et un abrégé de ce qui s'est passé de plus memorable, jusques...* (Leyden: Chez Pierre Leffen, 1651), 19.

⁵⁰ For a review of foreigners on Dutch women and business see Martha Moffitt Peacock, "The Imaging and Economics of Women Consumers and Merchants in the Netherlandish Marketplace," *Urban Space in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Age*, ed. Albrecht Classen and Marilyn Sandidge. *Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture*, 4 (de Gruyter, 2009), 667–711.

⁵¹ Moryson, *Itinerary*, 468.

he has accumulated whilst they live together, and to dispose of it at her pleasure.⁵²

While one might assume from this relatively consequential societal positioning of women and from the significant praise given Dutch heroines that the phenomenon of powerful women was always seen as laudatory in late sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Dutch society, such was not the case. There was certainly an equally vehement discourse regarding the unnatural and even terrifying nature of shrewish, overbearing women. Male paranoia over the women who took on male roles and characteristics during the Revolution also soon appeared in both texts and images. This censoring discourse was not only aimed at female soldiers; direct links were also made between manly heroines and termagant women generally who “wore the trousers” and ruled over men. Such ridiculing of tyrannical women became popular in a wide variety of media and it spawned a number of themes that were made popular in art, theatre, and moralizing texts. Most of the artistic representations were in print form with accompanying inscriptions, thus their humorously anecdotal character was able to be clearly and widely disseminated.

As already introduced, the theme of an upside-down-world where women beat, scold, and subjugate men was not new to the post-revolutionary Dutch Republic. It was an old theme by that point in history and was to be found in late medieval carnival practice, relief sculpture, and even book illumination. This tradition continued into the early modern era in prints and dramas throughout Europe. Indeed, a few of the Dutch prints had inscriptions in various foreign languages and were obviously meant for an international audience. There were, however, differences in the Dutch tradition. Unlike the French tradition, where women gained the upper hand through sexual wiles, Dutch women are generally displayed vigorously and violently fighting for their authority. And unlike the German tradition where female shrewishness is sometimes reprimanded with homicidal retribution by men, the Dutch tradition does not display retaliatory brutality—it is always the woman who uses or threatens physical violence. Furthermore, the sheer popularity of the Netherlandish portrayals, particularly through mid-seventeenth century, indicates a clear connection with gender trouble resulting from the discourse over role reversal generated during the Revolution. As has been discussed, the Dutch Revolution created a set of cultural circumstances and discussions that were unique to this emerging early modern society; it was a society where women taking on male roles was not just an imagined phobia or comic *topos*, it was a lived reality. Therefore, the humor

⁵² *Memoirs and Travels of Sir John Reresby*, ed. Albert Ivatt. Dryden House Memoirs (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, and Co., 1904), 137.

achieved via the comedy of the shrew was multifaceted. It was a formula of male discourse that jokingly attempted to correct the actual and incongruous usurpation of patriarchal authority in Dutch society. In addition, the condescending attitudes of the depicted fools or jesters who mocked weak husbands could be shared by all males who desired to assert their own societal hegemony over women. And finally, perhaps most importantly, ridiculing termagant women became a coping strategy for laughing at a cultural reality that obviously created apprehension among certain men in this society.

Censuring the unfeminine behavior of the revolutionary heroines occurs early in the seventeenth century in various historical writings. One of the most important reproaches comes from Hugo de Groot in his history of the Revolt.⁵³ He describes the actions of the women in the fight against Spain, but in a much less acclamatory tone. He asserts that because ideals of great import—God, the Fatherland, the Sovereign—were at stake during the Revolt, this caused the women to be filled with such a passionate hatred that they forgot the propriety and duties of their sex.

Even more disapproving, however, are the pseudo-historical sensationalist narratives of authors like Jacob van de Vivere and Simon de Vries. Perhaps the most overt evidence of the connections made in the Dutch male psyche between female soldiers and a fear of violent, manly women is expressed in such texts. In Jacob van de Vivere's *De wintersche avonden of Nederlantsche vertellingen*, 1615, the conflicting discourses over women's roles as associated with these heroines are expressly laid out.⁵⁴ He begins by asserting that bravery in a man is no wonder, but that manly deeds among the female sex certainly are amazing. Thereafter, he turns to the feats of the "*Nederlandsche Amazones*" (Dutch Amazons) and specifically to the famous story of Kenau Simons Hasselaer. In a rather praising spirit, he relates that during the siege, the women carried on very bravely. He describes how Hasselaer, a courageous and honorable widow of forty-six years old, used spears, guns, and swords while leading the other women in manly deeds—above the female nature—against Spain. In spite of this, however, he asserts that these women executed these manly deeds in female clothing. His source for this information most likely comes from the many images of heroines, as the other histories and diaries never mention what they were wearing.

This, significantly, is a crucial point for van de Vivere because these heroines did not cross the boundaries of what he considered appropriate to their sex. Indeed, he goes on to praise these women for their vigilance, bravery, and love for the Fatherland.

⁵³ Hugo de Groot, *Annales et historiae de rebus Belgicis* (Amsterdam: Joannis Blaeu, 1658), 133.

⁵⁴ Jacobus van de Vivere, *De wintersche avonden of Nederlantsche vertellingen* (Amsterdam: Dirck Pietersz, 1615), 117–19.

This, however, is not the end of his deliberations over manly women. He then states that some women fight for their own glory and that worse still, they do so in men's clothing. Evoking the bible, he condemns these dishonorable women who may have won the characterization of "brave," but are without modesty and honor. He relates the stories of two female soldiers who were discovered among soldiers wearing men's clothing and disguising themselves as males. Declaring brave women to be ridiculous, de Vivere closes with a poem that only reveres courageous women who act with modesty and in the fear of God. Other bold women do not please him because then he, as a man, is no longer the most powerful. He proclaims that he desires a "not-too-brave" woman for a mate.

The enduring nature of this discourse is attested to by its reappearance in the writings of Simon de Vries at the end of the century. In his *D'Eedelste tijdkoring der weetgierige verstanden of de groote historische Rariteitenkamer*, 1682, a similar intersection of conflicting discourses over female soldiers and bold women is found.⁵⁵ Indeed, de Vries even puts the contradictory opinions in the mouths of debating characters. At the outset, he criticizes women who go against their sex by dressing in men's clothing and doing battle. If, however, they do so in women's clothing for love of the Fatherland and the defense of their fellow citizenry, they are to be praised. He asserts that there are many examples of such women, but that he will only relate one, the story of Hasselaer. Citing van Metteren's history of the Revolt, de Vries recounts the events of the siege at Haarlem in which Hasselaer led three hundred fully armed women against the Spaniards. With spear, musket, and sword, she wished to help as a man and executed many manly deeds above the female nature. He claims that when the Spaniards saw this army of women, they cried that the women had become men. Importantly, even though he calls Hasselaer a "*mannin*," he also notes that she was dressed in female clothing.

After de Vries's character *Vroom-Aert* relates this history, *Vrolyck-Aert* immediately interjects that he does not think it advisable to talk about the valiant deeds of heroines in front of women. When the character *Vreedegond* asks him why, he responds with a story about a man whose shrewish wife, *Margriet*, developed a lust for fighting through listening to tales of women's heroic deeds. A lengthy discussion ensues in which *Vrolyck-Aert* consistently accuses women of seeking to rule over men while *Vreedegond* denies that this is true and defends the honor of women.

These two texts are telling in regards to male paranoia over the revolutionary heroines and their manly behavior. First, there is an important similarity in the texts of a discussion that evolves from a history of manly heroines of the Revolt to a polemic against the desire of contemporary housewives to rule over their

⁵⁵ Simon de Vries, *D'Eedelste tijdkoring der weetgierige verstanden of de groote historische Rariteitenkamer* (Amsterdam: J. Bouman, 1682), 119–27.

husbands. The development of these narratives evidences the clear existence and significance of this important association between women soldiers and overbearing housewives in the seventeenth century. Additionally, according to de Vries's text, wives were encouraged in their lust for power by listening to stories of these heroines. Even though both authors have reservations about women taking on manly attributes and power, they cannot bring themselves to criticize the heroines of the Revolt. As with almost all other historians, they must admit that these women acted with bravery. It appears that the women's fame was such that it was difficult to disparage their actions. Therefore, there is an ambivalence regarding these women who inspire both admiration and fear.

Clear associations between battling women soldiers and power-usurping housewives are also vehemently set forth in the art of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. A certain signifier of these absurd and incongruous situations is found in the upside-down world prints of this period. Such "*Verkeerde Wereld*" prints illustrated a variety of ludicrous situations in which the behavior represented was the opposite of that which was considered "natural." In a late sixteenth-century print, the third scene bears the inscription, "*Het wyf trect na de krych*" (The wife goes to war) (Fig. 4). The woman is shown holding various weapons of war, while domineering over her seated husband who is busy spinning with a distaff. Clearly, the ethos was that this was a situation in which the reversed actions were as ridiculous as, for example, men pulling a plow before an ox wielding a whip.

Of further interest in this print is the twenty-third scene where again the subject refers to the upside down-situation of women going to war. The image pictures a legion of women carrying banners, guns, and drum while storming a fortress. Some of the women fire guns at the figures atop the wall, as others begin climbing a ladder. The inscription below informs us as to what was considered to be the reversal of nature in this particular scene, "*De vrouwen bestormen thuys*" (The women storm the castle). The contemporary viewer could hardly have ignored the parallel with the famed deeds of Trijn van Leemput and her female regiment (Fig. 3). The illogicality of these situations must have primarily served the function of humor as most of the scenes do not relate to real situations, for example, animals who act as humans. The situation of warring women, however, did relate to the reality of the Revolt, and therefore the laughter involved in these scenes must have been somewhat uneasy.

Gangs of battling women are also to be found in late sixteenth-century images like a print published by Joos de Bosscher (Fig. 5). At the right of the print, the kneeling man and the seated woman forcing him to dress her in his trousers are reminiscent of the earlier discussed Battle for the Trousers print (Fig. 1). Strewn across the foreground are familiar symbols of wifely authority and shrewishness: spindles, winders, distaff, and tong. The pun on the word tong, which had the

double meaning of a shrewish woman, is implied here and reiterated by its usage as a weapon against the man in the left background.⁵⁶ He is also forced to do the female chore of winding. The broom lying in the left foreground is most likely another reference to this theme, as it lies in close proximity to the submissive man kneeling and kissing the woman's thumb. As Gibson has demonstrated, this was a sign of submission by the husband. He notes that the gesture was used with this meaning in a farce from the sixteenth century — *Een gheneuchlijck Tafel-speelken van een droncken man ende zijn wijf* (A pleasant farce of a drunken man and his wife).⁵⁷ Sweeping was another of the tasks relegated to henpecked husbands. Flying above this topsy-turvy scene is a banner bearing the words "*D'overhant*" (the upper hand), stressing that it is now the women who have the power. The other inscriptions give further commentary on the sad state of the household in which a woman rules:

Aut amat, aut odit Mulier, nil tertium
habere Dicitur: insanum ni foret Imperium.
Unde superba suum cogit sufflare maritum:
Et bradata, tenet bellica signa, MANUM.
Waer de Vrouw d'overhandt heeft, en draecht de brouck
Daer ist dat Jan de man leeft naer aduys van den douck
Ou la femme gouuerne, portant la banniere
Et des brayes avecq: le tout y va derriere.

[A woman either loves or hates;
she is said to have no third alternative,
Unless it is a crazed lust for domination
which causes her in her pride
to force her husband to knuckle under.
While she, wearing the pants,
holds up the battle standard, the HAND.
Where the woman has the upper hand,
and wears the trousers,
There it is that Jan the Man lives
according to the dictates of the skirt.
Where the woman governs, carrying the banner
And the trousers too, everyone follows behind.]⁵⁸

Once again, the pictured puns on who wears the trousers, shrews as tongs, and women getting the upper hand all contribute to the humorous riddling of

⁵⁶ Stoett, *Spreekwoorden*, 2:345–46.

⁵⁷ Walter Gibson, "Some Flemish Popular Prints from Hieronymus Cock and His Contemporaries," *Art Bulletin* 60.4 (Dec. 1978): 673–81.

⁵⁸ This translation was provided by Gibson, "Cock," 677.

Bosscher's print. Even though there is no fool present, the inscriptions serve to further elaborate the visual anecdote. Now the incongruous behavior and the comic caricatures are highly exaggerated, and the slapstick violence is even more uproarious. In addition, the overwhelming power of the women and the helpless submission of the men seem unalterable, as if it is an inevitable reality. Therefore, the connections with actual female battling and the resultant societal changes championing the power of women seem inescapable. More than ever, the laughter elicited from viewing this image must have provided a coping mechanism for males uneasy about overbearing women.

Comedies throughout this era use the Battle for the Trousers metaphor. In fact, it is overtly found in the title for an anonymous farce, *De broekdragende vrouw* (The Trouser-Wearing Wife) (1666). In this play, Baertje's mother, Fijtje, convinces her that she must take the mastery over her husband. Fijtje orders, "Nu moetje hem de broek afrijten. Bind hem nu voor uw schorteldoek" (Now you must rip the pants off him. Tie your apron on him now) Baertje, enjoying the thought of her new power, responds, "Nu ben ik meester van de broek" (Now I am master of the pants).⁵⁹ And later she further triumphantly declares, "Deez broek die is mijn wapenschild, Daar door betoom ik 'tmanlik wild" (These pants are my escutcheon, through which I restrain the male wildness).⁶⁰ Baertje, however, is soon taught her place when her husband, on the suggestion of a quack doctor, binds her in an animal skin until she concedes, "Ik zal u altijd d'eere geven Die aan een man gegeven wert" (I will always give you the honor which is a man's due).⁶¹

In a late sixteenth-century print by Karel van Mander, the battle for the trousers becomes much more of a real slapstick struggle, as neither the husband nor the wife has yet won the prized trousers (Fig. 6). They have both pulled on one leg of the trousers and are in the process of struggling in order to completely master the pants. The wife grabs the husband's hair, and he responds with a horrible toothy yowl as he attempts to restrain her. Neither of them, however, is willing to let go of the trousers. The greatly caricatured faces enhance the comedy of their antics and the inscription below further elaborates on the humorous anecdote and the inevitability of feared female power:

Och is dit niet derelick om medete gecken
min wijfe die quaet enen gheseet tu wil die broeck antrecken.
Mar noch is de man meer beclaecht daer de vrou master
ijeen Je broecke J moehs etc.

⁵⁹ *De broekdragende vrouw* (Amsterdam: Jacob Lescaille, 1666), Act 6.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, Act 9.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, Act 10.

[Oh this is not honourable for me to put up with
 the foolishness of my wife who badly attires herself
 and wants to put on these pants.
 But yet does the husband lament where the wife is
 master of your pants, you must put up with it.]

As has been shown, the battle of the sexes in these images frequently had metaphoric connections to actual battling during this era. Indeed, the war with Spain did not officially end until the Peace of Westphalia was signed in 1648. This connection becomes particularly clear in political prints where the upside-down behavior of gender roles is intended as a more bitter satire on unnatural tyranny. Such a linking between Spanish and female domination can be found in a print from the early part of the seventeenth century that was symbolic of religious arguments taking place in 1617 (Fig. 7).⁶² The print is another scene of marital discord, where a tearfaced man, under the sign *Bona Intentio* (Good Intentions), is shown spinning thread from a distaff. Underneath him is the word that describes his actions, *Obsequium* (obedience). His wife, under the sign *Discordia* (discord), sits with a winder scolding him. She mockingly holds up two fingers mirroring the two points on her husband's hat. Below, the action of the woman is appropriately labeled *Exacerbatio* (exacerbation). The force behind the woman's gesture seems to be the distaff held by the devil *Den Rocker* (The Distaff User) seated behind her. He uses the distaff to encourage the woman's cruel tyranny.

Another smaller devil is seated on the floor beside the man; he and a small spider busily unravel the thread spun by the man. This devil is labeled *die Verwarder* (the Entangler). On the wall behind the man hangs a tool called a hackle, which was used to dress the flax in preparation for weaving cloth. Spun across the corner of the open window is a spider web. From this window and the open door one glimpses a burning village and soldiers riding and marching to battle. The inscription beneath the scene describes the misery of the husband in this household and the evil domination of the shrewish wife.

Although the inscription beneath the print gives little insight into the connection between the scene of marital discord and the battle scene, it does associate the gender struggle with evil despotism generally. On a surface level the scene is one

⁶² Abraham van Stolk, Gerrit van Rijn, and C. van Ommeren, *Atlas van Stolk*, vol. 2 (Amsterdam: F. Muller and Co., 1895–1931), 80; Frederik Muller, *Beredeneerde beschrijving van Nederlandse historieplaten zinneprenten en historische kaarten*, vol. 4 (Amsterdam: N. Israel, 1970), 145. It is likely that many of the elements in this print were very familiar motifs. In an Antwerp procession of 1566, the second item listed is a representation of *Discordia*. She is described sitting and spinning bad threads with a large wheel. In the verse, she is associated with an upside-down world and is accompanied by deceit, hate, and argument, as described in Pamphlet 149a, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, The Hague, A3.

of marital discord in which the wife forces her husband to spin thread. The hackle (*hekel*) on the wall underscores the husband's misery. The hackle in this scene is more than a common household implement; it refers to the shrewishness of the famous *Dulle Griet*. As already mentioned, the proverb related that in addition to fighting the devil, she also bound her husband to a hackle. Further evidence of this Griet's evil nature is found in the inclusion of the two devils. One devil instigates the woman's mocking gesture while the other makes the man's misery worse by unraveling the threads he spins. It is important to note that the devil was frequently incorporated as an element of humor because folly and the devil were closely linked.⁶³

Another creature of evil that helps the smaller devil in his mischief is a spider. While this spider unravels threads, another spider spins a web in the window. The spider was frequently used as a metaphor for an evil person as is indicated by the expression "angry (or evil) as a spider." In particular, the spider was associated with evil, malicious, back-biting, or evil-plotting women. Furthermore, the spider's web was compared to a tissue of tricks and deceit.⁶⁴ One final point to note about the spiders is the bishop's miter worn by the spider on the floor.⁶⁵ In order to fully understand the meaning of these various elements, it is first necessary to provide an account of the historical events surrounding the production of this print.

The date of the print, 1617, was a year of great turmoil in the United Provinces due to religious differences. Bitter arguments between the liberal Remonstrants and the ultra-orthodox Counter-Remonstrants had reached a peak, with the latter group accusing their rivals of being papists and pro-Spain. Johan Oldenbarnevelt, one of the primary leaders of the States General, was to become a central figure in this religious argument as he attempted to peacefully negotiate between the two parties. Although he tried to settle the matter with regard to both arguments, the Counter-Remonstrants saw him as an enemy and virulently began to attack him from the pulpit and with bitter pamphlets. He was accused of receiving bribes from the Spanish, of being in close correspondence with the Jesuits and Rome, and of conspiring with Spinola, the Spanish general, to help deliver a Dutch defeat.

With this historical background, many of the elements in the print from 1617 gain a new dimension. The spider (*spin*) must be a reference to Catholicism with the bishop's miter, but it may also be a pun referring to Spinola.⁶⁶ In addition, Stone-Ferrier has pointed out that the act of spinning may be a reference to the

⁶³ Dekker, *Humour*, 40.

⁶⁴ The meanings of spiders and spiderwebs are discussed in Stoett, *Spreekwoorden*, 2:296–97; also *Woordenboek*, 14:2824, 2842.

⁶⁵ *Atlas van Stolk*, 2:80.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

Spanish general.⁶⁷ The tyrannical wife causes quarreling and discord through her shrewish behavior, just as divisiveness was instigated by Oldenbarnevelt and the Remonstrants. Furthermore, this divisiveness brings about the destruction pictured in the background and the tyranny pictured in the foreground, as the Remonstrants and Oldenbarnevelt were accused of being in league with Spain and the Catholic Church. The print, probably produced by Counter-Remonstrants, refers metaphorically to the divided, upside-down state of the United Provinces themselves. Many other prints depicting the discord brought about by the deceit of Oldenbarnevelt and the Remonstrants in league with Spain and the Catholic Church support the suggested interpretation of these motifs.

These political prints indicate the extent to which the theme of the shrewish and overbearing housewife had become part of the general culture in the Netherlands. It became a sardonic metaphor for the unrighteous usurpation of authority as well as a symbol for an anarchical situation in which things were not as they should be. The repetition of the forcing of female chores theme and its use in political contexts reveals the overwhelmingly negative associations and fear attached to the domineering housewife. In particular, representations of tyrannical women became symbols of wifely, and hence “unnatural,” political despotism.

A much lighter humor is delivered in the numerous connections made between images and the popular farce. Particularly frequent themes of the overbearing wife in farce had to do with the women scolding and beating their husbands for going to the tavern and getting drunk. The result was that women could easily triumph over their husbands in this inebriated state. The humor of these plots was particularly crude and boorish with much foul name-calling and slapstick violence. Such is the case in the comedy *Jan ende Klaer*, c. 1600. At the beginning of the play, Klaer praises her young husband. She stresses the advantages of being married, and she is happy to let her husband be the breadwinner of the family. When, however, Jan throws away his money at the tavern and comes home drunk, she scolds him and threatens to strike him. She warns him that she will now be the ruler in the marriage.⁶⁸

Similarly, in the farce *Lippijn*, the wife not only mistreats her husband physically and forces him to do female chores, she also makes him a cuckold. Lippijn is so weakened from his drinking and his old age that his wife is able to rule over him completely. She makes him do all the household work while she goes out to commit adultery.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Linda Stone-Ferrier, *Images of Textiles: The Weave of Seventeenth-Century Dutch Art and Society*. Studies in the Fine Arts. Art Patronage, 4 (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1985), 104–09; *Atlas van Stolk*, 2:95.

⁶⁸ Gastelaars, “Geweld,” 27.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 17.

The farce *Nieu Tafelspel van twee personagien* (New Play About Two People) (1623) centers the wife's anger over her husband's drunkenness on his wasting of money at the tavern. The husband in the farce is afraid to go home to his wife because, "Tgelt vant vercken is wel half verdroncken, Mijn bachuys sal vliegen vangen omdat ick ben beschoncken" (At least half the money from the pig has gone to drink. My backside will catch blows because I am drunk).⁷⁰ When his wife finds him, she threatens to kill him and gives him a sound thrashing, whereupon he is forced to do the household chores. The wife indicates that it is the husband's drunkenness that has caused him to lose the power as she accuses, "ghy hebt de broec verloren om u droncken gat" (You have lost the trousers off your drunken bottom).⁷¹ The closing lines, however, do not condemn the husband's wasteful, drunken behavior; instead, they warn other husbands against bad wives. They advise husbands to work hard in the support of their families because, "een quaet wijf wil gemeenlijc een dronken man slain" (A shrewish wife will usually strike a drunken man).⁷² Thus, the male viewer can laugh at the ludicrous reversal of power, take the position of these closing lines as one who is superior to the male character, and deal in a corrective fashion with his own paranoia over violent and tyrannical women.

A comparable humorous purpose is observed in a print by Salomon Saverij after Joos Goeimaere, 1610. This comedy of shrewish women evinces a clear connection with slapstick farce, as a group of women gather to beat a drunken man (Fig. 8). Wives in the community have now been called together to fight another type of battle. Three women force a trouserless man to his hands and knees. Two of them use their hands as weapons, while another uses the punning *pantoffel*. Like the distaff, the woman's slipper or *pantoffel* became a familiar weapon of the shrewish housewife. Its use for this purpose gave rise to the expression "*Onder de pantoffel zitten*" (to be under the slipper) implying that a man was ruled by his wife. Furthermore, a henpecked husband was called a *pantoffelheld*.⁷³ The young boy in the doorway plays the part of the fool, as he laughingly points out the ridiculousness of the behavior to the directly-addressed viewer. The inscription further elaborates on the hilarious display. On the left are the words of the drunken husband:

Helpt, Kittebroeren helpt, die so gaeren met de kanne om nat: clappen;
dees bsuete wyven, bij gans lijven, willen mij op 't gat: lappen.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 37.

⁷¹ Ibid., 20.

⁷² Ibid., 37.

⁷³ Stoett, *Spreekwoorden*, 2:138; *Woordenboek* 12.1:339.

[Help, fellow topers, help, who like to rap
with the jug for drink:
These cursed wives, want to beat me
on the rear, their whole lives.]

The words at the right belong to the wives who punish the drunkard for his foolish behavior as well as for upsetting the household:

Dat is voor u wtbrengen Dronckaert datmen t'huys wel ghebreck: lijf.
roept: ghij wert ghestoept, uyl proeft de muyl, om dat ghij sulcken geck
sijt.

[That is for you drunkard who caused the household to suffer
want;
Cry out: you are forced to your hands and knees,
rear end taste the slipper, because you are such a fool.]

It is important to note that it is not only the drunkenness that is ridiculed here. The small, pointing boy mocks him because his drunkenness has caused him to lose his trousers or his power over women. The man is forced to kneel before the powerful women and has become the proverbial *pantoffelheld*. Via humor, male viewers experience superior laughter over the man's predicament, but, also likely, an uneasy warning that drunkenness makes men vulnerable to their power-hungry wives.

Similar comedy in a painting by Jan Miense Molenaer, 1658, takes place in the more traditional tavern setting (Fig. 9). Here, the husband's fear and the wife's anger are even more exaggerated and humorously conveyed. Fleeing into the room with an expression of sheer terror, the husband lands in the lap of a courtesan. His wife is close behind and violently swinging at him with the familiar *pantoffel*. The courtesan tightly clutches the purse of money that she has acquired from the man through seduction, and she also dodges the wife's furious blows. All of the figures in the scene are caught up in the activity. The other tavern patrons merrily watch these antics and passers-by stop to laugh through the open doorway. Even the small dog follows the husband's example and flees for its life. The only somewhat independent figure is a small boy in the right foreground. Again, the child in this painting replaces the earlier fool as he looks toward the viewer and points out the folly of this behavior. In addition, he holds up a scroll with the wife's angry words:

Vint ick u hier ghy/ fuilen boer /
Hoe sal ick u dat / hooft noch klouun /
daer ghyt verteert / met schone / vrouwen daer /
ick't huis / Soo noet Behoef.

[So I find you here, you foul peasant,
Therefore, I will claw your head

Here you carry on with beautiful women
There at home I am needy.]

While the inscription is somewhat more sympathetic to the wife's anger, another element in the scene again indicates the henpecked nature of this poor husband. To the right, a smiling man stands in front of a birdcage and demonstratively holds up the bound feet of a bird toward the crowd outside the door. Such a gesture was used as a metaphor for a woman's power over her husband.⁷⁴

As these images indicate, the increasing power of women during the Revolt and thereafter in Dutch society caused a perception by some males that this development went against the bounds of what nature and God had intended for the female sex. As a result, numerous images ridiculing this societal condition appeared during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. The subject of the violent and shrewish wife took several forms in these images. Many themes developed in relation to popular puns and proverbs that ridiculed women who did not respect, and even assaulted, their husbands. Several characteristics indicate both the humorously entertaining and the seriously curative nature of these images. First, the appearance of many of them in proverb and upside-down world images indicates both the comical and corrective intent. Second, the inclusion of fools, or other jester types, as well as inscriptions in many of the works are meant to point out the incongruity of the depicted antics, so that the viewer might enjoy superiority over the figures. Finally, the exaggerated ferocity of the women and the caricatured weakness of the men contribute to the viewers' enjoyment in terms of comedic entertainment. Thus, the viewer could laugh at the slapstick comedy of the images while also experiencing a humorous release from the anxiety of a social situation where female power was on the rise. As has already been seen in the texts by van de Vivere and de Vries, the fear of over powering women was certainly an actuality in the minds of some men in the Dutch Republic.

Thus far, discussion over the intended entertainment of this theme has focused on theorizing the male perspective. And indeed, as most of the known artists of these images were men, it can be assumed that the theme was primarily presented through a male bias. It seems relevant in conclusion, however, to ask what women would have seen when viewing misogynist images of viragoes. As there were so many of these images and because they were also so closely related to the large number of like-themed contemporary farces, it is difficult to believe that they would not have also had an appeal for the female viewer. While finding clues to a female perspective is difficult due to the insufficiency of images or texts by

⁷⁴ On this metaphor see Martha Moffitt Peacock, "Hoorndragers and Hennetasters: The Old Impotent Cuckold as Other in Netherlandish Art and Farce," *Old Age in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, ed. Albrecht Classen. Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture, 3 (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2007), 485–516.

women, there is one image that is enlightening in this regard. It is a painting with a different type of power of women theme that has been attributed to the rather successful painter of scenes from daily life, Judith Leyster (Fig. 10).⁷⁵

The painting depicts a group of half-length merry-makers by candle light. All attention is directed toward a cat in swaddling clothes held by a woman in the center. This woman attempts to feed the cat with a spoon, while a caricatured man holds the bowl of food for her and laughs out toward the viewer. The fool in the background again indicates the humorous nature of the ridiculous actions, but anxiety over the shrewish woman is absent. Instead, all the figures seem to be enjoying the joke, which appears to stem directly from the farce *Batement van den Katmaecker* (Farce of the Catmaker) (1578). The husband in this comedy, Heyn, comes home drunk and expects to be beaten by his wife. Upon seeing that his wife's time for delivery of a baby is near, he refuses to send for the midwife. He wants to be able to see the child first. The neighbor women all begin to abuse him and call him names. One of the women threatens to scratch out his eyes. She warns, "Ic sal u leren tegen vrouwen oprechten" (I will teach you not to raise up against women).⁷⁶ Two of the women try to trick him by disguising a cat as a child and showing it to him. When Heyn discovers their deceit, he gathers the neighboring husbands, and together they all beat the women into their houses. There are forebodings of the moral of this story in the early musings of Heyn's drinking companion, Roel:

dat die Wijfs willen die mans bestieren, sullen wij ons laten van vrouwen
regieren?

Een man moet een man zijn, wiet sou becopen

[These wives want to guide these husbands, Will we let women rule?
A man must be a man, know that they will pay for it.]⁷⁷

Instead of emphasizing this outcome, however, Leyster provides us with a female perspective on this farcical subject that does not ridicule women at all; on the contrary, the humorous point is the fooling of the drunken men. This suggests that women were able to ignore the coping and corrective aspects implied in images that humorously exaggerated female power. Alternatively, women seem able to find other aspects of humor within these discourses.

In this regard, it is important to note that certain studies on humor demonstrate that women find greater humor in anti-male rather than anti-female jokes, while other studies indicate that women also find anti-female jokes funny. The

⁷⁵ This painting in a private collection has been attributed to Judith Leyster by the Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie.

⁷⁶ Gastelaars, "Geweld," 18.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

perspicacious suggestion offered by Lampert and Ervin-Tripp in regards to this seeming paradox is that because the experiential spheres of men and women are different, they are also reading two different jokes.⁷⁸ Leyster's painting further illustrates this theoretical position. Most cultural artifacts of this era were produced by males, so it was necessary for women to negotiate a perspective for themselves that could find entertainment within this large body of misogynist humor. In reviewing the images, it is important to remember that the men were also made ridiculous. They were caricatured as weak and foolish, and the moral often indicted them for submitting to their shrewish wives. Therefore, the woman could also perceive humor through superiority—that is superiority over dull witted and weak men, as is witnessed in Leyster's rereading of the misogynist *Katmaeker* farce. Furthermore, it should be restated that none of the images showed women being beaten or subjected to male authority. So in the sense that comedy is also frequently associated with joy or euphoria, these images provided women with an "imagining" of equal power between the sexes. That, as it will be recalled, was also the point of the heroine images that had instigated much of this battle-between-the-sexes discourse.

Even de Vries' text provided a more evenly balanced discussion of powerful women than that of other Dutch males. In his text, both positive and negative opinions regarding ruling women are given voice in debating characters. After the characters *Vroom-Aert*, *Vreedegond*, and *Vrolyck-Aert* discuss the bravery of Hasselaer and the effect these stories have on contemporary women, they begin to generally debate the character of women. *Vrolyck-Aert* consistently accuses women of seeking to rule over men while *Vreedegond* denies that this is true and defends the honor of women. At the close of the discussion, they ask the opinion of *Adel-Aert* regarding both the public and private rule of women. Unlike the rather firm patriarchal stand taken in de Vivere's earlier text, he asserts that sometimes it is better for a country to be ruled by a woman than by a man. Several historically famous women leaders, including Elizabeth I of England, are then cited by *Adel-Aert* as examples of women's suitability for leadership.⁷⁹

Taking this somewhat even-handed perspective into account, it is important to consider recent discussions on autonomy and individuals' ability to act independently. It has been suggested, for example, that a woman's autonomous ability to "imagine herself otherwise" in a male-dominated society is only possible

⁷⁸ In addition to theorizing gender differences in relation to specific jokes, these scholars provide a thorough review over the study of gender and humor in Martin D. Lampert and Susan M. Ervin-Tripp, "Exploring Paradigms: The Study of Gender and Sense of Humor Near the End of the 20th Century," *The Sense of Humor: Explorations of a Personality Characteristic*, ed. Willibald Ruch. Humor Research, 3 (Berlin and New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1998), 231–70.

⁷⁹ De Vries, *Rariteitenkamer*, 119–27.

when the “cultural imaginary” contains symbols, images, and representations that allow her to deliberate, self-define, and self-fashion without overwhelming restrictions to this mental process.⁸⁰ Also contributing to this possible refashioning of cultural power configurations is the role that humor plays in weakening the dominant conceptual structure in order to allow for other possibilities of societal organization.⁸¹ Indeed, in anthropology, the joke is viewed as an important tactic of subversion. It undermines the traditional balance of power and asserts that the common structuring of society is not inevitable.⁸² The Dutch Republic was a society in which this type of imagining was certainly possible due to the early overlapping of gender roles through the heroines of the Revolt and the resultant effect this had on women’s future power in the Republic. Perhaps, then, women in this society had better adapted their ability to laugh at the not-so-obvious aspects of a cultural humor that was still, for the most part, not produced with them in mind. Thus, even in negative portrayals of shrewish wives, women could take amused delight in their depicted triumph over men and in the imagined fulfillment of their aspirations to “even the score.”

⁸⁰ Catriona Mackenzie, “Imagining Oneself Otherwise,” *Relational Autonomy: Feminist Perspectives on Autonomy, Agency, and the Social Self*, ed. Catriona Mackenzie and Natalie Stoljar (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 124–50.

⁸¹ Murray S. Davis, *What’s So Funny? The Comic Conception of Culture and Society* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), 309–10.

⁸² Douglas, *Implicit Meanings*, 95–96.



Figure 1: Anonymous, *Battle for the Trousers*, Rijksprentenkabinet, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam



Figure 2: Jan Wierix after Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *Netherlandish Proverbs*, Rijksprentenkabinet, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam



Figure 3: Illustration from Johan van Beverwijck's *Van de uitnemenheit des vrouwelicken geslachts, Trijn van Leemput*, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, The Hague



Figure 5: Joos de Bosscher, *The Upper Hand*, Atlas van Stolk, Rotterdam



Figure 6: Karel van Mander, *Battle for the Trousers*, Albertina Museum, Vienna



Figure 8: Salomon Saverij after Joos Goeimaere, *Three Women in a Room Punishing a Drunkard*, Rijksprentenkabinet, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam



Figure 9: Jan Miense Molenaer, *The Irate Wife*, Location Unknown, Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie, The Hague



Figure 10: Attributed to Judith Leyster, *The Catmaker*, Private Collection, Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie, The Hague

Chapter 25

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The Comic Personas of Milton's *Prolusion VI*: Negotiating Masculine Identity Through Self-Directed Humor

If we consider the poet John Milton with regard to his comic sensibility, we would likely describe him as fastidiously witty rather than coarsely offensive, despite the vitriolic satire he frequently deployed in much of his polemical writings.¹ Although he found in humor, especially satire, “a strong and sinewy force in teaching and confuting,” he also firmly rejected the “self-pleasing humor of vain-glory.”² Yet as the master of ceremonies for the 1628 vacation exercises at Christ’s College, Cambridge, Milton was recruited to perform an initiation rite saturated by a puerile undergraduate humor that might seem the epitome of vanity and have little if any instructional value. At the heart of this yearly event was the ritual known as a “salting,” which served as a rite of passage for students, marking their transition from lower to upperclassman. The salting designated a clever upperclassman as the Father, who assumed the task of amusing the college audience by satirizing the members of the community, primarily, but not exclusively, the upperclassmen, and provided clever portraits of the freshman

¹ For a discussion of Milton’s distinction between comedy and satire, as well as the role decorum plays in the comedy of *Prolusion VI*, see Irene Samuel, “Milton on Comedy and Satire,” *The Huntington Library Quarterly*, 35.2 (February 1972): 107-30. For additional discussion of Milton’s use of satire, see also Roger B. Rollins, “‘And Laughter Holding Both His Sides’: Milton as Humorist; Part One,” *The South Carolina Review* 35. 1 (Fall 2002): 133-48; and Joel Morkin, “Milton’s Ideas on Satire,” *Studies in Philology* 69.4 (October 1972): 475-95.

² See John Milton, *Animadversions (1641)*, *The Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, 8 vols., ed. Don M. Wolfe (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953-82), 1:664; and *The Reason of Church-Government (1642)*, 1: 806.

initiates. The exercises were assigned a specific theme—in Milton's case, "That at times Playful exercises do not obstruct Philosophical studies"—which required the comic performer to demonstrate his rhetorical skill while making his classmates laugh through the use of bawdy humor. In the concluding portion of the exercise, the Father presided over a ceremony in which his "sons" (the freshman initiates) were expected to deliver their own comic performances, usually in Latin. If they failed to rouse their classmates' laughter, they were rewarded with salted beer to make up for the lack of "salt" or wit (Latin *sales*) in their performance. The judges of each freshman's skill were the previous years initiates, whose wits had already been tested (with or without success) the previous year.³

Milton's *Prolusion VI*, which consists of a long prose section in Latin, verses in English ("At a Vacation Exercise"), and a now lost prose section, also written in English,⁴ represents one of many public events that required Cambridge undergraduates to demonstrate their knowledge of classical languages and rhetoric. While other Latin exercises at the universities such as disputations and declamations were compulsory for all students,⁵ the task of presiding over the vacation exercises was assigned to a student who exhibited special promise in both Latin oratory and wit. Within the context of this prescribed performance, Milton dutifully and enthusiastically embraced many of the obligatory comic conventions of the genre, challenging what John K. Hale identifies as the poet's unfortunate and not always justified reputation, both during his time and ours, as a "lifelong sobersides."⁶ More importantly, and perhaps somewhat dangerously, Milton's performance as Father forced him to temporarily embrace a masculine persona that was very much at odds with the common view of him at Christ's College, where he was dubbed "domina" or "lady" owing perhaps to his sober demeanor

³ Roslyn Richek, "Thomas Randolph's Salting (1628), Its Text, and John Milton's Sixth Prolusion as Another Salting," *English Literary Renaissance* 12. 1 (Winter 1982): 107–108. Richek notes that similar rituals were performed at Dartmouth University in 1890 (108, n.22). John K. Hale situates the Cambridge saltings within a long tradition of ritualized student performance, including the entrance rituals at Dutch universities. See Hale, *Milton's Cambridge Latin: Performing in the Genres, 1625–1632, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies*, 289 (Tempe, Arizona: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2005), 196.

⁴ Although Milton was known to be especially careful about the management of his papers, the extant parts of the exercise were separated until the early twentieth-century, possibly owing to Milton's use of multiple amanuenses. While the English prose portion of the performance, "At a Vacation Exercise," was published in the *Poems* of 1673, the Latin prose known as *Prolusion VI* was published as part of *Epistolarium Familiarum Liber* in 1674. E. M. W. and Phyllis Tillyard united the texts in 1932; however, John Hale's edition with new translation is unique in that it provides a facing page English translation of the Latin, followed by the English verses. See Hale, *Milton's Cambridge Latin*, 209–10 and 239.

⁵ Hale, *Milton's Cambridge Latin*, 4–9.

⁶ Hale, *Milton's Cambridge Latin*, 195.

and unwillingness to drink excessively or patronize local brothels.⁷ However apt this characterization of Milton may have been, clearly it was rankling enough for the nineteen year-old to mention it directly in *Prolusion VI*, where he chidingly states to his audience, "For some have recently called me 'lady,'" and then inquires, "But why do I seem unmanly to them?" (283). While the point of the exercise is to make his audience laugh, especially at themselves and their fellow students, Milton recklessly draws attention to himself as already the subject of their gendered laughter through his acknowledgement of this unwelcome nickname.

Hale describes the salting as an event during which "a year's intake of freshman were inducted by means of a public ordeal and drama into seniority, in front of their older peers," and suggests that despite the salting's potential for social disruption, the genre was not especially subversive.⁸ Milton's contribution to this genre, however, undermines the traditions of the university in which he is expected to perform a set of coded verbal gestures that merely disrupt the social order only temporarily. Milton's use of self-reference in the exercise, although by no means uncommon in university saltings, is excessive and vacillates between self-deprecation and self-defense. But while the humor in these performances usually functions as the vehicle for communal laughter, in Milton's case it is the medium through which he attempts to restore his masculine identity within the exclusively fraternal community of the university setting. Milton's query regarding his lack of masculinity is followed by an impassioned defense of the chaste, intellectual male, yet prior to this moment in the exercise he explores two other masculine personas that enable him, both comically and rhetorically, to reinvent himself in the eyes of his fellow students. Expanding the exercise into a performance with a two-part structure, Milton constructs an *Oratio*, in which he delivers a more formal and dignified oration on a set theme, and a *Prolusio*, where he addresses the requirements of the ritual in the comic fashion demanded by the genre. While Milton uses the *Oratio* to develop a humorous performance of his own self-perceived identity as a particular masculine type, the serious student passionate about learning and overly chaste in his behavior, he more directly challenges his reputation as unmanly in the more blatantly comic (and bawdy) *Prolusio* as he takes on the requisite role of the Father. Despite the narrow parameters of this performance, Milton's comic maneuvers work to overturn and refigure the various masculine identities he embodies through his performance in *Prolusion VI*. And although Milton initially appears to confirm his classmates' view of him in the *Oratio*, his comic dissimulation ultimately turns his fellow students'

⁷ All citations from *Prolusion VI* are from John K. Hale's English translation in *Milton's Cambridge Latin*, 283. All subsequent quotations from this edition will be cited parenthetically.

⁸ Hale, *Milton's Cambridge Latin*, 186.

voluntary complicity with his initial mocking self-portrait into a forced complicity with his subsequent satirical portrait of them.

Saltings, according to Rosalyn Richek, reached the height of popularity as student led college rituals at English universities between the mid-sixteenth and mid-seventeenth centuries.⁹ Although only a handful of salting scripts survive from Cambridge,¹⁰ with each exhibiting variations in length and overall structure, each reveals common attributes and familiar tropes: the requisite Father and Sons device, a comparison of the Sons to dishes served at the banquet, humor involving bodily functions, criticism of the university curriculum, and occasional albeit brief references to contemporary political events. Despite fulfilling a prescribed ritual—fraternal initiation through good-natured mockery—the content and structure of these texts display as many differences as they do commonalities, as evidenced by a brief comparison between Milton's text and one produced the year before at Trinity College. The surviving salting script by Thomas Randolph, a royalist who was known for his skill in comedic writing, is relatively short (314 lines long) and moves quickly from his opening address to his portraits of the freshman initiates. Milton's text, on the other hand, is excessively long, and designates a great portion of the typical salting foolery—especially that dealing with the Father and Sons—to the second half of the Latin prose portion.¹¹ Randolph uses the conventional metaphor of the Sons as banquet dishes, a trope that Milton's salting acknowledges only to abandon it in favor of a less predictable concept. Instead, Milton presents his Sons as the Predicaments of Aristotle, an idea that Randolph alludes to in his text, but chooses not to develop.¹² While the similarities between the two texts suggest that Milton was likely present at the Trinity College salting of 1627, or at least heard about it, the differences, in particular Milton's expansion of the introductory segment of the salting, suggest that he took advantage of the freedom of the occasion to develop his *Oratio* into an equally important part of the performance.

From the beginning of the *Oratio* until nearly the end of the *Prolusio* Milton clearly enjoys the license with content and structure that the Father was typically

⁹ Richek, "Thomas Randolph's Salting," 107–08.

¹⁰ See Hale, *Milton's Cambridge Latin*, 200. Records of saltings also exist for Oxford University, and both Richek (105–06) and Hale (200) cite an account of the practice in Anthony Wood's *The Life and Times of Anthony Wood, Antiquary, of Oxford, 1632–1695, Described by Himself* (ed. Andrew Clark, 5 vols. [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1891–1900]), 1: 138–39).

¹¹ Both Richek and Hale note that salting scripts offer only a partial record of the actual performance, especially as the extempore comments, from both the Father and the Sons, in the actual performance may well have been modified in the existing texts. See Richek, 112, and Hale 201, note 17.

¹² For a fuller discussion of the similarities and differences between Randolph and Milton's texts, see Richek, "Thomas Randolph's Salting," 112, and Hale, *Milton's Cambridge Latin*, 202–06.

afforded within the loose confines of the exercise.¹³ Milton, however, seems to exceed this allowance, marking the most notable difference between his approach and Randolph's by the extent to which the former uses the public platform of the salting as an opportunity to turn the occasion to "something which more concerns *myself*" (281). While Anne Baines Coiro suggests that Milton's salting text seems less personal than Randolph's, we must assume she is referring to the difference between Randolph's and Milton's descriptions of the Sons, which not only vary in length, but also are strikingly different in tone. Milton's English treatment of the two freshman that are acknowledged in "At a Vacation Exercise," although undoubtedly followed by additional portraits in the lost English prose portion, takes up a total of 49 lines, while Randolph's completed portrait of his Sons spans roughly 240 lines.¹⁴ Milton clearly reserves the personal touch not for his Sons but for himself, as he shapes both the *Oratio* and the *Prolusio* to continually revisit the subject of his own manliness, at times indirectly and at others quite explicitly.

The author's decision to include an opening section or *Oratio* equal to the length of the *Prolusio* suggests the significance of that departure, especially when we consider that so much of *Prolusion VI* is preoccupied with self-representation. As Stephen M. Fallon has pointed out, Milton "found it difficult to resist writing about himself," and that during his Cambridge years these autobiographical tendencies are largely motivated by "lack of 'public achievements' and the handicap of anonymity."¹⁵ Although Fallon's assessment is helpful with regards to the poetic ambitions Milton expresses in "At a Vacation Exercise," with regards to the Latin sections of the exercise we can assume it is due to Milton's recognized achievements as an orator and Latinist that he was chosen as a replacement for the student originally selected to preside over the event.¹⁶ However anonymous Milton may have been in the broader sense of poetic achievement, his skills as an orator were recognized by his fellow students, who may also have seen in him a measure of the humor with which he would pepper the proceedings. More to the point, as a college persona he was certainly notorious enough to acquire the nickname of "lady" among his fellow students—and, one presumes, among undergraduates throughout the university. For Milton, the roasting of the initiates is a means to an end, acknowledged and eventually attended to, but very much subordinated to recovering his own reputation, which becomes the driving force behind the rhetorical exercise.

¹³ Hale, *Milton's Cambridge Latin*, 281, note 32.

¹⁴ Ann Baynes Coiro, "Anonymous Milton, or, *A Maske Masked*," *ELH: English Literary History* 71 (2004): 609–29.

¹⁵ Stephen M Fallon, *Milton's Peculiar Grace: Self-Representation and Authority* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007), ix, 46.

¹⁶ The student originally selected to preside at the salting was expelled after vandalizing the town's water supply, an event to which Milton alludes in the *Prolusio* (272).

In much of Milton's later writing, the personal is frequently subordinated to his polemic, providing relevant but at times discordant digressions into his own personal realm.¹⁷ In *Prolusion VI*, however, Milton situates self-representation alongside his representations of his fellow students, connecting both to the rhetorical subject of the exercise (the balance between study and recreation), and enhancing his role as orator with the comic maneuvers that he employs to advance his argument. He becomes, in effect, a comic rhetorician, a comedian with a rhetorical objective. Although bawdy jokes and social satire play a role in Milton's performance, the element that rescues it from a somewhat limited comic genre is his strategic use of self-deprecating humor. While Milton's official role in the proceedings is the Father, who has come to entertain his fellows and initiate the freshman, he must also negotiate the unofficial role of the "lady," the unmanly student who provides a source of humor for his classmates. In order to temporarily embrace the first role (Father) and unequivocally reject the later ("lady"), Milton develops a third persona that relates more closely to his own identity. Jure Gantar notes that "The most efficient manner in which a comedian . . . can take advantage of self-deprecating laughter is by establishing a surrogate stage identity that stands both for himself as a person and for his character as the vehicle for his laughter."¹⁸ While both the Father and the Lady make their appearance within the salting, and serve as a vehicles for this event characterized first and foremost by communal laughter, Milton first paints a more flattering and accurate picture of himself as he would be seen: the sage, fastidious undergraduate who is able to poke gentle fun at his own shortcomings, however minor they may be.

Milton's relationship to his audience, both personally, as a fellow student at Christ's College, and rhetorically, as the master of ceremonies for the salting, is also worth considering in relation to the comic personas that Milton's explores. As far as we know, Milton enjoyed no close relationships with fellow students at Cambridge. In fact, the people with whom he appeared most intimate at this time (as evidenced by his correspondence) were his childhood tutor Thomas Young, Alexander Gil, the son of his former master at St. Paul's School, and Charles Diodati, a fellow Paul's schoolmate who pursued his studies at Oxford.¹⁹

¹⁷ Milton's description of the "soberest and best govern'd men" who are taken in by the "bashfull muteness of a virgin," in *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* (1644) is undoubtedly a reference to his own hasty and ill-informed courtship of his first wife, Mary Powell, especially as he uses this example to illustrate the need for reform in the courtship ritual. See *Complete Prose Works*, 2: 249.

¹⁸ Jure Gantar, *The Pleasure of Fools: Essays in the Ethics of Laughter* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005), 131–32.

¹⁹ For a fuller account of Milton's Cambridge years, see Barbara K. Lewalski, *The Life of John Milton: A Critical Biography* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 15–52.

Undoubtedly Milton's Cambridge years were challenging, not only from a social perspective but also from an academic one. His rift with his tutor, William Chappell, in his freshman year was largely owing to disagreement over the Cambridge curriculum, and almost resulted in his not returning to Cambridge at all.²⁰ However much the subsequent years may have validated Milton's intellectual place at Cambridge, there is little to suggest his time there was filled with the kind of fraternal camaraderie that the salting invites. Michael Lieb contends that Milton's "sense of alienation and indeed hostility is discernable from the outset of the *Prolusion*," and that, for the young poet, the salting is "a serious game and the stakes are high."²¹ Milton's hostility notwithstanding, his treatment of the salting as an occasion for argument is as much a part of the proceedings as is his desire to recover his reputation and best his tormentors. However hostile Milton may have been toward his fellow students, he does not overplay his hand too early in the comic rhetorical game. In each instance of his shift from one persona to another he devises a new strategy for both presenting himself and negotiating his relationship with his audience. As the overly eager student, he is earnest and self-deprecating, obsequiously deferring to his audience, whom he flatters excessively. As the Father, he is comically jovial and occasionally bawdy, predictably redirecting the comedy from himself to his audience, both as individuals and as members of a group worthy of his satirical barbs. It is only when Milton directly acknowledges his nickname that the comedy turns to the more virulent satirical mode he will later employ within the context of polemic: in other words, when something more than entertainment is at stake.

In order to provide a counterpoint to the two opposing yet equally problematic personas of Father and Lady, Milton establish an alternate figure that represents a more accurate approximation of the self. As the more serious portion of the exercise in which Milton introduces the subject of his argument, the *Oratio* serves as the supreme occasion to offer an idealized self-portrait not as others would insist upon seeing him, but as Milton himself would be seen. Even though he does not directly acknowledge his image as an unmanly youth until much later in the exercise, Milton is nonetheless attentive to the disparity the audience may anticipate between the "lady" that they imagine him to be and the Father that he will become for the purpose of the salting. That Milton was an earnest student is a fact he is willing to acknowledge to those who already know this only too well. But according to many early biographies, as well as Milton's early poems, he was also a young man who was willing to indulge in the pleasurable pastimes offered

²⁰ For a discussion of Milton's dispute with his tutor, see Leo Miller, "Milton's Clash with Chappell: A Suggested Reconstruction," *Milton Quarterly* 14 (1980): 77–87.

²¹ Michael Lieb, *Milton and the Culture of Violence* (Ithaca, NY, and London: Cornell University Press, 1994), 87.

in his hometown during school vacations.²² In many ways, the opening portion of Milton's salting functions as a humorous and clearly transparent attempt to set the record straight.

As a result of his classmates misreading of him, the nature of Milton's self-referentiality takes on a slightly defensive posture in the *Oratio*, implicitly alluding to his fellow students' representation of him as "unmanly" as he comically attempts to challenge his image as an excessively fastidious and overly studious youth. Milton uses the *Oratio* to construct an identity with which he can engage an audience eager to laugh with and, quite possibly, at him, but also in order to sway an audience to his side of the argument. Milton's use of self-deprecating humor, both in the *Oratio* and toward the beginning of the *Prolusio*, is designed precisely to bridge this gap between the comic speaker and his audience. As Ganter notes, "self-deprecating laughter both separates and joins us; it confines and liberates. It is at the same time laughter at (oneself) and laughter with (those who laugh at us)."²³ Milton's self-representation relates to this paradox, as he constructs a humorous and, at times, exaggerated portrait of the eager student returning to the rigors of Cambridge from the more relaxed world of London. But while Milton's humor helps him connect with his audience, it also distances him from at least some members of his community—those who would mark him as unmanly through their anti-intellectualism—and thus the humor serves to highlight the dislocation Milton experiences as humorous subject.

Part of what Milton must accomplish in the *Oratio* is the engagement of his audience, something he achieves through the creation of a persona who argues persuasively and comically the theme of the salting: "That on occasion sportive exercises do not jeopardise philosophical studies" (245). As the studious undergraduate who can balance both work and play, Milton advances his argument by way of illustrating for his audience how this balance might be achieved, first by embracing the wholesome pastimes available in London, and then by returning to one's studies with a sense of purpose. Milton paints just such a picture of himself at the opening of the *Oratio*, describing his return to Cambridge "crammed full of the pleasures with which it [London] overflows, and (...) hoping to have once more a time of literary leisure, as the mode of life which I believe heavenly spirits rejoice in" (245). Here he contrasts the pleasure of London with "literary leisure," deemphasizing the rigors of intellectual pursuit in an effort to create a more balanced image of himself as he shifts from his role as vacationer to student. Yet although he acknowledges that he has enjoyed this

²² See Hale, *Milton's Cambridge Latin*, 195; and *The Early Lives of John Milton*, ed. Helen Darbishire (London: Constable, 1932). Evidence of Milton's delight in a variety of youthful pastimes is also very much present in his early sonnets, especially XIII, XVII, and XVIII.

²³ Ganter, *The Pleasure of Fools*, 114.

break from his studies, the fact that he was "crammed full of pleasures" suggests, comically, that some of those pleasures may have been in excess of what he required. At the very least, the delights of the school break are in opposition to his ultimate desire to immerse himself in his studies, a fact that he openly acknowledges to his fellow students: "Deep in my mind was the intent to bury myself in literature, and to devote myself day and night to sweetest Philosophy; for thus always the alteration of work with pleasure tends to banish the boredom of satiety, and to cause interrupted tasks to be resumed the more eagerly" (245). This passage modulates from a sense of moderation—"the alteration of work with pleasures"—to a sense that when one overindulges in pleasure, whether by choice or by force, the surest remedy is the subsequent application of oneself to the higher task of intellectual pursuits. And clearly, at least with regards to Milton's syntax, work is the remedy for the over indulgence of pleasure, but the opposite is not necessarily the case.

If Milton's acknowledgement of the value of pleasure is not especially convincing, it becomes even less so when he dramatizes the scene that leads to his election as the Father, a task that is not only untimely but quite "disruptive" to his plans. Milton begins the *Oratio* by acknowledging his eagerness to return to his studies, yet he ends his opening paragraph by exaggerating the disruption that occurs when he is conscripted for the frivolous task of performing the salting. While the tone throughout the opening segment is humorous, Milton anticipates the comic needs of his audience by making himself a laughing stock as he is dragged away from his books to this undergraduate ritual: "I received a summons! I was dragged away . . . I was commanded to transfer all the zest which I had destined for acquiring knowledge to trifles, to the inventing of new forms of fooling—" (245–47). This mock kidnapping, staged by Milton himself, consciously fuels the stereotype of the overly serious student unwilling to leave his studies except by force. Although he begins the *Oratio* with the image of a young student satiated with the pleasures of London and eager to return to Cambridge, he concludes this initial narrative with his violent removal from the place of refuge he has sought. Despite the fact that both his *Oratio* and the thematic subject of the exercise itself argue for moderation in both recreation and scholarship, Milton is clearly being forced to embrace pleasure ("trifles") at the expense of work ("knowledge"). The transference of allegiance from one activity to another, working against both Milton's opening statement and the argument of the salting itself, suggests a replacement of work with pleasure at the expense of moderation. In the end, his brief introduction to his part in the salting as reluctant participant invites laughter, and perhaps even a little sympathy from his classmates, who, if they know him at all, can imagine his actual response at having been taken away from his studies for the purpose of such foolery.

Although Milton's acknowledgment of his preference for work over play might ultimately feed his image as an unmanly student, he uses his intellectual acumen to renegotiate the terms of masculinity for the studious undergraduate who prefers knowledge to trifles. After giving his audience something to laugh at (his abduction), he turns the attention to the role he has been designated to play within the salting, and, more importantly, to other motives for complying with the demands of his audience. Speaking directly to his audience, Milton acknowledges the anxiety he experienced during a prior public performance—possibly the exercise eventually printed as *Prolusion III*—where he took advantage of an assigned oratory to take pot shots at the university curriculum he abhorred.²⁴ Milton notes, "I was further allured into undertaking this role [Father] by your new-found friendliness towards me" (247), and then goes on to discuss that prior occasion at which he doubted his reception:

I say "new-found" because when some months ago I was to perform an academic oration in your presence I thought that my excogitations would get a cold reception from you . . . And yet, against my expectation, against any slight hope I had, I perceived instead—no, I felt it—that my efforts were accepted with unusual applause from everyone . . . on this occasion a keen hostility proved willing to interpret my many mistakes and infelicities in a gentle and lenient spirit, more than I deserved. (247–49)

In this passage Milton acknowledges his past anxiety about their reception of his performance, and, in acknowledging that his anxieties were unwarranted, forces his audience to recognize their past complicity with him as a public speaker at university events. Nonetheless, he still has his insecurities and defects, seen when he subjects himself to self scrutiny: "when I descend into myself and with my eyes turned inward look secretly at my own weak powers, I blush from consciousness of what I alone know about myself" (251). Although he is prevaricating here, exaggerating his "weak powers" at the expense of his seasoned skills, and hinting at some troubling self-knowledge as yet unknown to his classmates—not to mention figuring himself as a blushing youth—he nonetheless places his past success where it rightfully belongs in the present moment: in the hands of his fellow students. He reminds them that they not only have the power to acknowledge him now, but also that they have done so before, forcing their recognition of their past enjoyment if not their present laughter.

By emphasizing the anxiety attendant upon a public, Latin performance, Milton suggests that the ultimate test of masculinity is whether one's peers recognize and

²⁴ The title of this declamation is "Against the Scholastic Philosophy." Hale neatly summarizes Milton's approach as "relying wholly on an uncomplicated, forceful, contrasting: Schoolmen (bad) vs. new Baconian curriculum (good)." See Hale, 89.

applaud one's effort. But Milton does something else in this passage, placing his masculine rhetorical success in the hands of those who, as he will remind us in the *Prolusio*, have already attempted in some way to unman him. Although Milton here is speaking about a specific moment from the past, the language he employs implicitly links intellectual authority with masculinity through the use of thinly veiled sexual metaphors. He places his manliness in the hands of his peers, soliciting their assistance in the confirmation of his powers:

Let the soft breeze of your goodwill erect me, faint as I am, for I know it can; let it warm me back to life. So, thanks to you, my incapacitation will not prove serious; and its remedy, since it is you who apply it, will be all the more pleasant and acceptable—so much so, indeed, that to faint like this more often will be most agreeable to me, for the sake of being brought back to life each time by you. (251)

Milton's stance at this point is one of defeated manhood: he pleads incapacitation, claiming he can only be roused to his full intellectual powers by the encouragement of his fellow students by way of their applause. It is masculine recognition of Milton's skilled rhetoric that will "warm" him "back to life" and he is counting on the "remedy" of their applause to carry his performance. For Milton, the lows and highs of academic success are a humorously fitting replacement for those that might involve less noble activities, such as gaming or whoring, that he would be unlikely to trouble himself with. Nonetheless he cleverly uses this moment to initiate a series of phallic puns, which will pepper later portions of the entire exercise, commanding his audience to "think . . . what matchless power you possess, what amazing virtue, that like Achilles' spear . . . can both wound and heal!" (251). Finally, Milton is not content to allow his fellow's to "warm" him once. Instead, he imagines this experience of "fainting" and being "brought back to life" as something that enables him to experience the pleasurable empowerment that follows his "weakness" or potential for failure again and again. It is the continual recognition of his fellows that he seeks, imagining their applause imbuing in him the masculine potency that he associates here with intellectual ambitions.

Milton's efforts in the *Oratio* to entertain his audience through a humorous self-portrait, as well as his reminder of their recent complicity in his pedagogical arguments, works to create a bond between performer and audience that is crucial to the success of his efforts in the *Prolusio*. In reminding them of their past acknowledgement of his skill, he subtly points out that they have already recognized in him the only masculine attribute that matters in the public forum of the Latin exercise, whether it be the requisite performances of declamations or the invited honor of leading the salting. And just as Milton is dependent upon them for their "goodwill" and, eventually, applause at his present performance, so too do they rely on him for the comedy that this particular performance promises. Of

course, Milton's exaggerates his own shortcomings and anxieties while elevating their generosity and intellectualism. Even if he fails in the present endeavor of the salting, he still counts it an honor to speak before them: "what *I* behold is the most learned of ears, engrossed in my words and hanging on his lips!" (253). He describes himself "surrounded on every side by so large a throng of the most learned!" (251), but the audience has yet to fully prove its worth. The proofs of his virility are, initially, his ability to drive his argument home, which he does in a rather predictable fashion of offering claims (257, 259) followed by exempla (261), and, subsequently, through his conscious undermining of the extra-intellectual masculine attributes that at least some of his peers would place above the more predictable masculine attribute of sexual virility. However much Milton's surrogate identity as scholar might play upon stereotypes of the overly zealous student, it nonetheless provides a necessary counterpart to the two identities he will grapple with in the remainder of the exercise. Ultimately, his ability to claim the applause of his peers in his past performance is a mark of his masculine rhetorical success—and he reminds them of this fact in the present performance, where his ability to embrace the role of Father and cast off the role of lady will be as much at stake as his ability to amuse his audience.

Although Milton is most himself in the *Oratio*, he is still performing a role, predictably espousing the subject of Philosophy while secretly—at least until the opening lines of "At a Vacation Exercise"—aspiring to poetic greatness. Yet he shows enough of himself to establish an identity as a scholar, skilled at oratory, who is not above the occasional joke at his own expense, and clever enough in his use of classical sources to sway his audience while provoking in them a desire to be entertained. In his efforts to introduce both himself and his argument, he inevitably betrays his final, and perhaps not very popular, pronouncement on the subject of his oratory: that "anyone who is so captivated by stupid jokes that he neglects in their favor the serious and more useful things of life, he, I say, is making good use of *neither* sphere," concluding that "few can jest well and wittily unless first they have learnt how to behave seriously" (265). He follows this serious and self-revealing pronouncement, perhaps the one that most obviously defends his own character, with an acknowledgement of his self-indulgence ("But I fear, O members of the University, I fear I have spun out my thread too long" [267]), promising to free both himself and his audience "from the laws of oratory" with "comic licence" (267). Referring once again to the integrity of the persona he has created, Milton promises to "strip off and for awhile lay aside my usual habit for the sake of pleasing *you*." (267). Although Milton ends the *Oratio* with an emphasis on the audience's pleasure, both inviting and "demand[ing]" that they prepare themselves to "APPLAUD, and LAUGH!" (267), he nonetheless betrays to the end his own preoccupation with self-representation, particularly the reputation he is attempting to create for himself within the college community: "If anything loose

or licentious is said, you are to suppose it is not my mind and nature but the rules governing the time and spirit of the place prompting it" (267). This apology, both predictable and cleverly strategic, plays to the misconceptions of the audience and the truths that Milton cannot resist revealing about himself.

If in the *Oratio* Milton addresses his potentially unreceptive audience as one that granted their praise in the past, he also acknowledges them as the very audience who would insist on misreading him outside of the confines of a more formal Latin performance. From a personal perspective, Milton's entire performance depends on his audience having a double knowledge of him. While he is worthy of their praise when he is arguing the case of disgruntled college students faced with an outdated university curriculum, he is also most decidedly, according to his own admission, worthy of their scorn on other counts. While his introductory self-portrait in the *Oratio* attempts to redeem him via the masculine virtue of his intelligence and wit, his performance as Father, and his later acknowledgement of his reputation as lady, speaks more directly to the inadequacy that he feels as a member of this male community. Although Milton paints a humorous portrait of himself in the *Oratio*, he does so in a way that both confirms and challenges his audience's assumptions about his identity. He leaves the most amusing and improbable representation of self, the Father of numerous Sons, for the *Prolusio*, where, for the most part, he will conform to the expectations of the salting genre. This portrait of masculinity is really too exaggerated to entertain realistically in relation to Milton's persona as studious youth, yet the manner in which he embodies the role of Father lends to even greater complicity between performer and audience.

While in the *Oratio* Milton is eager for his classmates to recognize a more accurate approximation of self, in the *Prolusio* he quickly establishes himself as an imposter—as a conscious performer—on multiple counts. He opens the *Prolusio* with an assessment of the situation and his place within it: "The republic of fools is in crisis, it seems, and almost collapsing; and I have been made its emergency leader to save it—though goodness knows how I earned the distinction. Why me?" (271). In describing himself as the "emergency leader" of the proceedings, Milton acknowledges that he was not the initial choice for the office. Milton is not only known at Cambridge for his unwillingness to participate in comic fooling (unlike, for example, Thomas Randolph), he is also no fool. The tension between playing the fool and actually being a fool is interesting here, especially because the original Father designated for the salting was expelled for engineering an extremely foolish prank: tampering with the town's water supply. Milton has, it would seem, replaced a true leader of fools, whom Milton describes in mock-heroic fashion as "a hardened warrior" (271) who led "a force of up to fifty Sophisters, armed with short staves, across Barnwell Field" (271). Although Milton insists that his predecessor would have "carried out" the Father's "duties bravely" (271), the

shortness of the staves might be read in relation to the inadequacy or shortness of the wit—or, perhaps, manliness—of this leader and his eager followers. The tone of this passage is humorous, but it quickly becomes clear that however much Milton may not be an ideal leader for this venture, his reading of this episode actually places him in a place of greater masculine authority because it provokes laughter at someone else's expense.

In the *Prolusio*, which contains the conventional elements of the salting proper, Milton seems to share his audience's apprehension about whether he is fit for the specific tasks that accompany his role. While the portrait of the original Father sits in stark contrast to Milton's self-portrait as the eager yet insecure student who must fill his shoes, Milton is clearly posturing here as he proceeds to embrace effortlessly the comic vulgarities of the salting. Despite his initial protestations, Milton the orator seems, as Coiro points out, "clearly very pleased to have been asked to lead this rowdy, clever ritual."²⁵ Turning, as he has already done in the *Oratio*, from the subject of himself to the subject of his audience, Milton no longer hopes for their laughter but requires it, confident that his jokes will win the day. While in the *Oratio* Milton reminds them of their past acknowledgement of his powers, here he relies heavily on their heightened expectations about what he will offer during the present performance. Through a comic portrait of the college porter, "our spark-flashing Cerberus" (273), Milton likens his audience to heroic adventurers "willing to Penetrate hell" (273) to attend the day's performance. But like the heroic former Father, the audience may, in fact, be largely misguided in their desires, even as Milton admonishes them not to "regret taking this troublesome, perilous journey" (277). There may be a sumptuous feast awaiting them at the end of their travels, but they can also anticipate a serving of abuse from their leader and host.

As he embodies the comic role of the Father, Milton demonstrates the extent to which he can perform masculinity in a way that meets the formal expectations of the salting occasion for this abusive, tribal entertainment that, as Hale notes, serves as a "ritualized parodying of hierarchy," quite likely with the Father donning the robes of the college Master.²⁶ Although the hazing-like penalty of the salted beers is yet to come, Milton's Father takes seriously his role as the procurer of their laughter, especially as the failure to laugh comes with the penalty of the Father's abuse. He first invites them to laughter—"So laugh, and raise a guffaw from your saucy spleen, smooth out your furrowed brow; let your nose curve with laughing" (271)—identifying, as he does so, those who may either not be inclined to laughter or inclined to laugh at his jokes. But the anticipated reason Milton provides for his audience's refusing to laugh itself invites the laughter of the audience, serving as

²⁵ Coiro, "Anonymous Milton," 616.

²⁶ Hale, *Milton's Cambridge Latin*, 199.

its own kind of special penalty for those who would reject Milton's comedy. In perhaps the most revolting of Milton's salting humor, he notes that those who only laugh "half-heartedly" (273) will ultimately be betraying something embarrassing about themselves:

I shall say it's because he is trying to hide his teeth, which are rotten and scabby and covered with disgusting gunk, or sticking out in all directions; or else he is afraid to stretch his belly any further in laughing because he has stuffed it so full at the feast that he might give us a duet from two orifices! . . . He might express some gastric riddles to us, not from his Sphinx but from his sphincter; . . . Such riddles I leave for the medical people to interpret, not Oedipus . . . Let the medics give the enigma an enema. (273)

Those who fail to laugh will themselves be the objects of laughter—and not just Milton's, but of their fellow audience members. While the ability to laugh at oneself is a special test of the audience in this particular communal gathering, at the same time it is not necessarily appealing within this particular context. The point of this kind of humor is to be as disgusting as the subjects being described, but to do so with the kind of cleverness that makes laughter as inevitable as the flatulence of the audience or the offending of one's neighbor with "stinking breath" (273).

In the *Prolusio*, the tables clearly are turned as Milton is licensed to abuse others as he himself has been abused, and it is here that the ritual serves the somewhat sadistic function of first isolating and reincorporating members of the fraternal group. As Hale points out, Milton's strategy—in fact, the general strategy of the salting—"is the classic device of divide-and-rule,"²⁷ where the formerly self-deprecating comic turn the tables on his audience. As one who has been cruelly singled out himself, undoubtedly Milton took some pleasure in performing the most predictable of the salting's elements. Milton concludes this segment by introducing more requisite components of the salting, turning from the gastric challenges of the students to the description of the banquet. This evolves into a comical lampoon of various groups of upperclassmen as the dishes themselves: fatted boars "pickled in beer for three years" [the seniors], "prime oxen," "fifty calves heads . . . short of brain," "young goats," overly thin from "too much rutting" (277), and exotic birds, including the turkey, Irish birds that resemble cranes, and geese, and, finally, eggs (279). Again, as with the jokes about bad breath and flatulence, the describing of the dishes is designed to turn the attention from the comedian to the subject of his comedy, his fellow students, who are trapped within the confines of the salting exercise to take whatever punishment the Father dishes out. But when this ritualized aspect of the salting is complete,

²⁷ Hale, *Milton's Cambridge Latin*, 212.

Milton finally turns to the most conventional and most lewd of the salting's tropes that his audience would have expected him to explore: that of the Father and his many Sons.

Milton's embodiment of the stock character of the Father in the *Prolusio* depends on a delicate negotiation of masculine representation as he questions his ability to embody the ultra virile role of Father in contrast to the relative youth and lack of experience of the initiates, his Sons. Although Milton has still not yet confronted his audience publically with his nickname at this point in the salting, he does draw attention to its fitness when he focuses on the sexual nature that the most obvious task of "fathering" requires. In contemplating the role he is to play, he more directly alludes to the sexual aspects of paternity and the ironies it entails for the undergraduate who plays the role. Just as the Inns of Courts have their "'Lords of Misrule,' showing even in this their ambition for status . . . we Academicians likewise, in our desire to get as close as we can to paternity, desire to take on as a pseudonym the role we do not risk, except in secret—" (281). Although we are eager to claim the status associated with the Father, Milton suggests, we do not actually wish to father illegitimate sons during our Cambridge years. Just as Milton is not old enough to have fathered the grown Sons (the freshman initiates) whom he will eventually address in the final segment of the salting, he is also unlikely to have engaged in the sexual activities that would lead to the production of illegitimate offspring.

As the most foreign or artificial persona with regards to Milton's actual person, it is not surprising that he rhetorically embraces the Father with greater theatrically and conventionality than he does the representation of the youthful student with which he opens the exercise. And while Milton the comic performer is always also Milton the undergraduate as he embodies each of these roles, he is most himself when he breaks completely with the pretense of the entertainment. While in the *Oratio* Milton lures his audience into a false sense of security, making himself the subject of his own humor, in the *Prolusio* he shifts from the role of the Father to his direct acknowledgment of his external positioning as the lady. The role of eager student and "Father" create a comic buffer between himself and his audience members, but once he addresses directly the subject of his alleged unmanliness, all barriers are momentarily removed and the pretense of both the comedy and the persona is dropped. Indirectly introducing the subject of his own chastity, Milton invites his audience to consider, as Milton does himself, "how come I am so quickly become a Father?" (283). Milton asks, "have I been violated by some god, as Caeneus was of old, and won my masculine gender as a payment for the deed, to be suddenly turned from female to male?" (283). In challenging his audience to account for his transformation from lady to Father, he is moving beyond the performance of an identity to the negotiation of a new one.

Yet in this final segment of the salting, Milton's use of humor and his interaction with his audience shifts radically, if briefly, as his gentle chiding turns to a rather aggressive assault in which he defends himself by critiquing them. Just as he has previously used sober intellectualism as the root of wit, here he again emphasizes the source of true masculinity as knowledge, disparaging "these witless grammar-bunglers" who "attribute to the feminine what is properly masculine?" (283). Essentially, grammar would collapse if gender were so unstable, and Milton, being a more than competent Latin grammarian, must be either embracing one gender or the other, but clearly not moving so erratically between the two. If Milton can master Latin grammar, as well as perform adequately the role of the Father, how can he possibly be a woman? He connects these "grammar-bunglers" with masculine types that he clearly does not embody: those who "go in for drinking competitions" or prove "their manhood in the way these debauchees do" (283).²⁸ In a complete refusal of the role his fellow students would wish to impose upon him, he bluntly states, "I wish they could as easily stop being asses as I could stop being a woman!" (283). In spite of his virtuous character, Milton is able to make the rhetorical shift from "lady" to Father, demonstrating not only his facility with gender, but also his facility with language.

Not surprisingly, the passage in which Milton publically acknowledges his unfortunate nickname has received much attention from critics, who have suggested that he openly embraces his identity as "lady" at this point in a manner that acknowledges if not his unmanliness, at least his rhetorical playfulness with the idea of gender, including his own.²⁹ Michael Urban, for instance, notes that while Milton "defends his own masculinity, we have every reason to believe that he would rather continue being 'the Lady of Christ's College' than alter his chaste behavior in order to conform to such men."³⁰ While Milton certainly rejects such pastime activities as excessive drinking and whoring, he is also clearly reinventing the idea of manliness, taking gender, so to speak, entirely out of the body and placing it in the realm of the mind. Just as Milton had previously deployed wit as evidence of the mastery of knowledge in the *Oratio*, he again calls upon classical

²⁸ In this particular passage, Milton also distinguishes himself from another group of more masculine types: those with hands "grown calloused holding a plough-handle" and those who could claim the profession of "oxherd by the age of eleven" (283), possibly representing the college "sizers" who performed menial labor as part of their keep (Lewalski, *The Life of John Milton*, 18). For a discussion of the class implications of this passage, see Lewalski, 31.

²⁹ See, for example, Michael Lieb's discussion of Milton as bisexual (meaning bi-gendered) in *Milton and the Culture of Violence*, especially 97–99.

³⁰ David V. Urban, "The Lady of Christ's College, Himself A 'Lady Wise and Pure': Parabolic Self-Reference in Milton's *Sonnet IX*," *Milton Studies* 47 (2008): 1–23; here 5. Although Urban relies heavily on Leib's discussion of *Prolusion VI*, he also acknowledges that despite his references to Tiresias and Caenus, "Milton distances himself from any association with transgendered—and sexually charged—characters" (5).

learning as evidence for his masculinity in the face of the charges he now openly acknowledges. Associating his virtue with that of the most learned of ancients, he complains of his detractors,

And look how foolishly and witlessly they object to what is rightly a matter of honour to me. For Demosthenes himself was called “too little of a man” by his rivals and opponents. Hortensius, too, second only to Cicero among Roman orators, was called “Dionysia, a singing woman,” by L. Torquatus. Hortensius replied: “I would rather be this ‘Dionysia’ than what you are, Torquatus—tasteless, boorish, and crass.” (283)

The lack of taste, boorishness, and crassness of those who would call him “lady” is evidence of a lack of wit, which not only provide evidence of learning, but would also offer recognition to the long-dead intellectuals that Milton willingly groups himself with. More to the point, even in a sportive exercise in which abuse is the Father’s objective, Milton suggests it is far more shameful to be called an ass or a boor than to be dubbed less than a man in the terms he has been subjected to. And by ending this passage with the clever retort of his brother in unmanliness, Hortensius, Milton has the last laugh: he shares with his audience a moment in which they might not wish to identify with the upbraided Torquatus—ass that he is.

Milton distances himself not so much from the nickname itself but rather from those who would apply such a moniker without realizing that their clever, learned classmate might transform it into a badge of honor. Yet he has not done so without engaging in what might be considered the unethical aspects of laughter, particularly in its more divisive forms, of which he himself has been the victim during his time at Christ’s College.³¹ Ultimately, Milton attempts to transform this laughter that takes as its aim his expulsion from a community of men into Ernest Dupreel’s idea of the “laughter of welcome,” which Marcel Gutworth describes as a variety of laughter that “creates and celebrates a kind of unison on which group life thrives.”³² Milton attempts to create an alternative world in which he, as well as like-minded fellow students, may find their place among men of intellect in spite of the trifling stupidity of those who would exclude them from the social life of the university. Although Milton insults his detractors, he cannot help but “rejoicing in so favorable and happy an omen, and exalting that I am united by the reproach of the nickname with such great names” (285). In some ways, this retort allows him to identify his community—to separate the wheat from the chaff—and,

³¹ For a discussion of laughter’s propensity to breech ethical considerations, see Ganter, *The Pleasure of Fools*, 32–33.

³² While for Dupreel the “laughter of welcome” stands in opposition to the “laughter of exclusion,” Gutworth suggests that of the two exclusionary laughter forges the more powerful of the bond. See Marcel Gutworth, *Laughing Matter: An Essay on the Comic* (Ithaca, NY, and London: Cornell University Press, 1993), 37.

through his comically serious performance, single out those among his fellow students who are "good and excellent" (285), as well as those who are "spiteful people so low that they are not worth the retaliation of name calling" (285). Ultimately, Milton redefines the terms of masculinity by entirely discounting gender as narrowly defined by his detractors: "Indeed I utterly repudiate whatever relates to "Lord" and "Lady." I do not wish to be any sort of overlord except in *your* forums and tribunals, O my fellow-students" (285). It is only on the intellectual stage of the salting that Milton claims any masculine authority—and while he ends the *Oratio* demanding his audience to "APPLAUD, and LAUGH" (267), he concludes his *Prolusio* with a more ambitious and unconventional request, commanding them to "give me your ears and minds!" (287).

However much the salting represents an important initiation for its freshman participants, it also serves as an initiation rite for Milton. Prior to the performance of the *Prolusion*, Milton exists within the hollowed ground of Cambridge University as a victim of exclusionary humor—the sort that singles him out as other, and denies him full acceptance into and recognition from the college community. Milton, however, categorically rejects the standing fraternal community represented so fully by the momentary transgressions of the salting exercise itself, even as he seeks their applause and laughter. By first embracing and later consciously refiguring himself as a humorous subject (albeit one that fits his own refined tastes), Milton is able to transform the negative humor of his classmates' satirical reading of him into one that allows him, owing to his rhetorical skill and wit, to negotiate a new community in which he himself is at the center rather than at the margins. Moreover, the audience that Milton's confronts at the opening of the exercise is symbolically disbanded by the time he completes his Latin address. Instead, Milton imagines a community in which his fellows will render their "ears and minds" to one whose aspirations transcend the university's narrow intellectual vision to attain new intellectual heights as he begins the final extant portion of the salting. Turning away from the limited social and intellectual world of the university, Milton transitions from the comic role of Father to the more sober role of poet, rejecting both rhetoric and Latin with the opening lines of "At a Vacation Exercise": "Hail native language" (line 1). Finally, at least with regards to what remains of Milton's performance, we see the fruits of the intellectual labor of the serious undergraduate, with the rhetorical and linguistic lessons of the university directed toward their proper object: poetry. In contrast to the crude dishes proffered by the Father, Milton's own contribution, the "daintiest dishes" of his performance, are "served up last" (line 14) to those who would join him in the spiritual and intellectual company of Demosthenes, Hortensius, and other unmanly men.

Although the salting, as Hale points out, is an "allowed and ritualized parodying of the hierarchy" of the college, thus affording limited potential for social

subversion,³³ Milton's contribution to the genre reveals how a prescribed rite can be transformed into an occasion for the disruption of the very values of the institution that sanctions it. While there are too few extant examples of the tradition of the "salting," Milton's text provides readers with evidence of how humor can serve not just as a release, but also as an important tool for negotiating the distance between the rhetor-comedian and his previously unreceptive audience. While the audience on this occasion was undoubtedly given much with which they could be entertained by Milton, we cannot know for certain the extent to which he actually made his fellow students laugh. We also cannot know whether these young men were in any way moved by the combination of rhetorical skill, self-directed humor, and less than benevolent satire to embrace their "Father's" moral instruction. As Milton himself would write in *Of Reformation* (1641), humor, especially the "vehement Expressions" found in satire, is at times a "necessity, to vindicate the spotless *Truth* from an ignominious bondage."³⁴ Both Milton and Truth appear, at least temporarily, somewhat less bound by the symbolic chains of both the university and its students by the end of his comical performance. Milton's comedy allows him to create the illusion of ceding to tradition, of tacitly agreeing with the methods of instruction and the measures of masculinity to which he has been subject during his tenure at this all male institution. In the end, however, *Prolusion VI* exploits the comic tradition of the Father in order to reject the very fooling that Milton temporarily embraces, offering a provocative intellectual and gendered challenge to the masculine traditions and "ignominious bondage" of this community.

³³ Hale, *Milton's Cambridge Latin*, 199.

³⁴ John Milton, *Complete Prose Works*, 1: 535.

Chapter 26

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Ridentum dicere verum (Using Laughter to Speak the Truth): Laughter and the Language of the Early Modern Clown “Pickelhering” in German Literature of the Late Seventeenth Century (1675–1700)

Institutions are necessary for the existence of any society, yet their insistence on order, control, and social conditioning can lead to the repression, if not suppression, of basic human drives, emotions, and such liberating processes as laughter.¹ Partially in recognition of these needs and the desirability of amusement as a diversion from everyday troubles, but also with a mind to exercising damage control, the Church did support holy-days and festivals, in particular for the period before Lent known as Carnival, so that all classes, especially the lower powerless ones, would have a chance to indulge their natural appetites and experience a release from the prevailing sets of social and moral codes, if only for a limited period of time. To underscore this point, Bakhtin quotes from a circular letter disseminated by the Paris School of Theology in 1444²: “Foolishness . . . is our second nature and must freely spend itself at least once a year. Wine barrels burst if from time to time we do not open them and let in some air.”

¹ For a concise survey of this complex human phenomenon, see the introduction of Albrecht Classen in this volume. I would like to thank Karin Mayes of Arizona State University for her editing of the manuscript and her many helpful suggestions. All translations are my own, unless otherwise noted. Since metaphors and puns can be difficult, if not impossible to translate, I have attempted to retain the meaning as much as possible, which can result in some awkwardness from time to time.

² Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (1968; Bloomington, IN: Midland, 1984), 75.

Freedom from our own pent-up emotions then, as well as from stifling tyrannies and rigid³ social hierarchies, institutions, etiquette, conformity, and other forces is inextricably intertwined with laughter, whose overall importance is perhaps best summed up by Ron Jenkins⁴: “Laughter is a biological imperative, a complex cognitive and physiological response to the human condition that is as necessary for survival as water, air, and freedom.” It is indeed a form of spiritual nourishment that helps us cope and hope and even transcend whatever is oppressing us; it is moreover the glue that holds together body, mind, and soul. The vital figure, synonymous with this laughter, who came to personify the physical, material side of life, and not just during the joyous Carnival season, was the licensed Fool and/or Clown (derived from the Latin word for “peasant,” i.e., “colonus”), the entertaining representative and, as it were, “mock king”⁵ of the common people who were often equated with herrings.⁶ The emphasis on the lower body in this regard is worded by Sheppard with a play on words that any Pickelhering would admire:⁷ “Carnival laughter, Bakhtin implied, affirmed that the *human* comes from and will return to the *humus*, the soil, and that its earthy *humour* reminds man—who, in Western culture, stresses the gap between himself and Nature—of his more basic side.”

The Fool/Clown was an all-round entertainer,⁸ obsessed with food, drink, sex, and money, but one who mirrored, albeit in exaggerated form, the imperfect human condition, as Hamlet so concisely states in a German prose adaptation of

³ What Bergson says is in this case very true indeed: “Cette raideur est le comique, et le rire en est le châtement” (This rigidity is the comic, and laughing at it is the corrective) – see Henri Bergson, *Le rire. Essai sur la signification du comique* (Paris: Alcan, 1899; repr. Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1981), 16.

⁴ Ron Jenkins, *Subversive Laughter. The Liberating Power of Comedy* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), xii.

⁵ Michael D. Bristol, *Carnival and Theater: Plebeian Culture and the Structure of Authority in Renaissance England* (New York and London: Routledge, 1989), 140.

⁶ *Joachim Rachels Satyrische Gedichte. Nach den Ausgaben von 1664 und 1677*, ed. Karl Drescher. Neudrucke deutscher Literaturwerke des XVI. und XVII. Jahrhunderts; 200/202 (Halle a. d. S.: Max Niemeyer, 1903), 77. The Spanish Ambassador in a tragedy by Christian Weise expresses his preference for a monarchical form of government over a democratic one in terms of fish imagery: “Ein Lachs-Kopff [i.e., Printz von Condé] ist besser als tausend Herings-Köpfe” (One salmon head [i.e., Printz von Condé] is better than a thousand herrings’ heads). The herring heads with their wide open mouths represent the common people as gaping fools, a condescending comparison that is indicative of the attitude of certain circles within the upper classes. For the quote, see Christian Weise, *Der gestürzte Marggraff von Ancre in einem Trauer-Spiele* (1681), in *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. John D. Lindberg, 25 vols. (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1971), 1: 60.

⁷ Richard Sheppard, “Upstairs – Downstairs – Some Reflections on German Literature in the Light of Bakhtin’s Theory of Carnival,” *New Ways in Germanistik*, ed. Richard Sheppard (New York, Oxford, and Munich: Berg, 1990), 279–80.

⁸ Maurice Lever, *Zepter und Schellenkappe. Geschichte des Hofnarren*, trans. Kathrina Menke (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1992), 110.

Shakespeare's play⁹: "... man kann in einem Spiegel seine Flecken sehen" (... one can see one's faults in a mirror).

Everything he does and represents is geared toward laughter. If we laugh at him as he challenges the authorities by transgressing social and moral norms with his immoderation, lack of reason, and spiritual myopia, or if we laugh with him as he points out the failings and weaknesses of others,¹⁰ we do so at our own peril for we too are less than perfect and need at times to conceal individual tendencies that can be counter-productive in our social relationships and/or to our career. In a comedy by Christian Weise, the chamberlain Robert underscores this need¹¹: "Wir sind alle Bauern; Doch welcher den Bauer im Herten verbergen kan / daß er nicht an das Tage-Licht kommen kan / der wird ein qualificirter Hoffmann genennet" (We are all peasants, yet he who can conceal his peasant nature so that it does not see the light of day is regarded as a competent courtier). This is not restricted to what is allegedly our cruder and coarser nature, but also applies to our more humorous and/or satirical side, as Count Robert points out in an earlier play by Weise¹²: "Allein dieses ist die Menschliche Klugheit / wenn jemand seinen Pickelhering so verbergen kan / daß er allezeit vor eine ernste Haupt Person angesehen wird" (This in itself constitutes human wisdom when one can hide one's Pickelhering in such a way that one is regarded at all times as a respected model for others).

The function of the Fool/Clown is not just to mirror or point out behavior that can lead, in contemporary understanding, to sin and eternal damnation, but also to offer the possibility of a cure. Laughter namely was often prescribed by doctors in the seventeenth century as a remedy for the catch-all illness of "melancholia," and people still believed that the root cause of any illness was sinful behavior. In order to change this behavior, the members of the audience were offered satirical "pills" by the Fool/Clown in order to restore them to the path of morality and

⁹ *Tragoedia. Der bestrafte Brudermord oder: Printz Hamlet aus Dänemark* (ca. 1677), in *Die Schauspiele der englischen Komödianten*, ed. Wilhelm Creizenach. Deutsche National-Litteratur, 23 (Berlin and Stuttgart: W. Spemann, 1888; rpt. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1967), 164. This play was in all likelihood in the repertoire of the Carl Andreas Paulsen-troupe since there is a reference to this director in the play itself. Many of the other plays in the repertoire also contained a Pickelhering.

¹⁰ This dual function of the fool/clown is reflected in Pinson's comment: "... while embodying human folly and the entire society of sinners, he, at the same time, also assumes the position of the wise outsider who points out the culpability of the 'other' fools." — See Yona Pinson, *The Fools' Journey. A Myth of Obsession in Northern Renaissance Art* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2008), 1.

¹¹ Christian Weise, *Ein wunderliches Schau-Spiel vom Niederländischen Bauer* (1700), in *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. John D. Lindberg, 25 vols. (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1986), 12/2: 365.

¹² Christian Weise, *Lustiges Nachspiel / Wie etwan vor diesem von Peter Sqventz aufgeführt worden / von Tobias und der Schwalbe / gehalten* (1683), in *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. John D. Lindberg, 25 vols. (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1976), 11: 363.

ultimate salvation, a fundamental goal underlying the humanistic view of folly in works such as Sebastian Brant's *Narrenschiff* (Ship of Fools; 1494), Desiderius Erasmus's *Moriae Encomium* (Praise of Folly; 1515, German 1534) and *Till Eulenspiegel* (1510).¹³

It is precisely by transgressing social norms that the Fool/Clown reminds us of their existence either implicitly or explicitly. As a persona with multiple identities who is much like an onion from which one can remove layer after layer without ever finding an essence, he moreover symbolizes the *vanitas mundi* (the vanity of the world) and reminds us of our own mortality, i.e., yet another reason to prepare for the Hereafter. In opposition to the conserving principle or the *civitas Dei* (the City of God) personified by the monarch and supported by most German writers of the time, he, also a part of the author, reflects the opposite principle of dissolution and change or the *civitas diaboli* (the City of the Devil) and is therefore potentially subversive.¹⁴ However, through his use of indirect methods such as satire, parody, euphemism, semantic incongruity and irony he is more like a castrated Harlequin¹⁵ who has been appropriated by conservative middle-class authors seeking to rectify problems within the system rather than replace it.¹⁶ The following either/or statement by Davis could therefore be amended to a both/and proposition¹⁷: "... festive life can on the one hand perpetuate certain values of the community, even guarantee its survival, and on the other hand, criticize political order."

The German term "Pickelhering" initially referred to a particular social type¹⁸ who had a craving for salted herrings which were usually consumed along with beer or wine, but later came to designate a practical joker or anyone from any social class such as the figure Colonel von Wangenheim¹⁹ who had a merry

¹³ For *Eulenspiegel*, see Albrecht Classen, "Laughter as the Ultimate Epistemological Vehicle in the Hands of Till Eulenspiegel," *Neophilologus* 92 (2008): 471–89; here 486.

¹⁴ Theologians often associated the Pickelhering with the devil and inveighed vehemently against his making fun of such serious topics as adultery as well as for using language and gestures deemed obscene – for examples, see Johann Joseph Winkler, *Des Heil. Vaters Chrisostomi Zeugnis der Warheit wieder die Schau-Spiele oder Comödien* (n.p.: Johann Daniel Müller, 1701), [A2^r], [B2^r], [B4^r].

¹⁵ Jenkins, *Laughter*, 111.

¹⁶ Manfred Kremer, "Bauern-, Bürger- und Frauensatire in den Zittauer Komödien Christian Weises," *Daphnis* 17 (1988): 99–118, here 118; Gordon J. A. Burgess, 'Die Wahrheit mit lachendem Munde.' *Comedy and Humour in the Novels of Christian Weise*. Berner Beiträge zur Barockgermanistik; 8 (Bern: Peter Lang, 1990), 181. The same applies to the other authors discussed in this article.

¹⁷ Natalie Zemon Davis, "The Reasons of Misrule: Youth Groups and Charivaris in Sixteenth-Century France," *Past and Present* 50 (1971): 41.

¹⁸ Christopher Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus and Other Plays*, ed. David Bevington and Eric Rasmussen (Oxford: University Press, 1995), 160.

¹⁹ Friedrich Rudolf Ludwig Freiherr von Canitz, *Gedichte*, ed. Jürgen Stenzel (Tübingen: Max

disposition and entertained his listeners with amusing anecdotes. It was of course also often used in a derogatory sense to vilify anyone suspected of foolish thoughts and/or actions, including unpatriotic dandies and their female equivalents, or even personal enemies, as was the case with Samuel Johnson²⁰ or with Johann Beer and his adversaries, the Gotha Professor of Moral Philosophy, Gottfried Vockerodt (1665–1725), and the music theoretician and cantor Wolfgang Caspar Printz (1641–1717). Even although Beer had apparently played the role of the Pickelhering in a number of plays²¹ and had even adopted the pseudonym of "Alamodus Pickelhering"²² for one of his satirical novels, he shared the ambivalence of the age toward this figure of folly whom certain Church Fathers such as Tertullian and Chrysostomus had already demonized,²³ as seen in Beer's translation of a quote by the Strasbourg theologian Johann Dannhauer, namely "Diabolus est morio, Christi simia," with²⁴: "Der Teuffel ist Monsieur Pickelhäring / oder Jean Potage / welcher Christo alles nachäffet" (The Devil is Monsieur Pickelhering or Jean Potage who apes Christ in all things).²⁵

The designation of Pickelhering was also applied to con-men such as Caraffa or street performers such as Ciarletto²⁶ who acted as a barker and entertainer for a charlatan in the marketplace or during the fairs. Such assistants employed many methods, for instance, shouting, turning somersaults, standing on their heads, or performing in playlets in order to attract a crowd to their master's booth or trestle stage. The two roles could moreover be combined, as was, for example, the case with Tetjeroen who had a very successful career in Amsterdam in the first half of the eighteenth century.²⁷ In addition, it could be applied to the court jester who

Niemeyer, 1982), 355.

²⁰ *Samuel Johnson's Insults*, ed. Jack Lynch (New York: Walker & Co., 2005), 67.

²¹ Richard Alewyn, *Johann Beer: subtitles separated by colon. Studien zum Roman des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Leipzig: Mayer & Müller, 1932), 53. Alewyn unfortunately does not give a source for this quote from Gottfried Vockerodt, but it is one that Beer addresses in *Ursus Vulpinatur* ([1697]), in *Sämtliche Werke: Musikalische Schriften*, ed. Ferdinand van Ingen and Hans-Gert Roloff, 12 vols. (Bern: Peter Lang, 2005), 12/1: 86.

²² Johann Beer, *Der deutsche Kleider-Affe* (1685), in *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Ferdinand van Ingen and Hans-Gert Roloff, 12 vols. (Bern: Peter Lang, 1997), 9: title page.

²³ Ernst Hövel, *Der Kampf der Geistlichkeit gegen das Theater in Deutschland im 17. Jahrhundert* (Münster: Coppenrath, 1912), 6.

²⁴ Johann Beer, *Ursus murmurat* (1697), in *Sämtliche Werke: Musikalische Schriften*, ed. Ferdinand van Ingen and Hans-Gert Roloff, 12 vols. (Bern: Peter Lang, 2005), 12/1: 17.

²⁵ The devil and the Antichrist were often called God's Ape; see Dirk Bax, *Hieronymus Bosch. His Picture-Writing Deciphered*, trans. M.A. Bax-Botha (1949; Rotterdam: A. A. Balkema, 1979), 41. Cf. also the contribution to this volume by Catherine Bousquet-Labouërie.

²⁶ Wolfgang Caspar Printz, *Musicus curiosus, oder Battalus, Der Vorwitzige Musicant* (1691), in *Ausgewählte Werke: Die Musikerromane*, ed. Helmut K. Krausse, 3 vols. (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1974), 1: 523.

²⁷ Jacobus Scheltema, *Volksgebruiken der Nederlanders bij het Vrijen en Trouwen* (Utrecht: J.G. van

was responsible for entertainment during meals²⁸ and was used by Weise as a synonym for the "Druschemann,"²⁹ a minor town official in Silesia and the Lausitz who, among other things, announced births, deaths, and marriages and provided entertainment during the marriage reception or for celebrated guests passing through the town.³⁰

The Pickelhering as an early modern clown of English provenience³¹ was in particular associated with the jig farce and dominated the German-language stage in the performances of the itinerant English and (later German) acting troupes that toured the continent throughout the seventeenth century. Until around 1670, this extremely popular persona which had been played for the most part by the director of the entourage (who also happened to be the best actor), was multi-functional, as described by Samuel Sturm (1625–1688) in his preface to the reader³²:

Pickel-Hering wird von den Gemeinen nur vor einen Narren oder Possenreisser in den Comödien gehalten / weil er in kurtzweiligen / nährischen Habit auffgezogen kömpt / auch possirliche und nährische Geberden macht / und dergleichen lustige Auffzüge und nährische Schwencke vorzubringen pfleget: In der That und Werck selbst aber ist er der rechte Haupt-Meister / Actor oder Regierer / Stiffter und Ordner der gantzen Comödie / der sich in allen Aufftritten oder Scenen / Acten und Verthönungen finden läst / nicht bloß einen Narren zu agiren / sondern aller Personen Reden und Stellungen mit genauen Augen in acht zu nehmen / daß / wann einer in der Unterredung irren / oder in der Präsentirung seiner Person einen Fehler begehen möchte / er solches mit seiner Gegenwart ersetzen und etwan mit einem lustigen Possen bemänteln könne / damit ein ieder Zuschauer solches nicht so bald mercke. Darumb er die gantze Comödie oder Lust-Spiel im Gedächtnuß haben / auch aller Personen Ordnung und Nahmen wie sie einander folgen / und was eine jede präsentiren und reden soll / eigentlich wissen muß.

[Pickelhering is considered by the commoners to be no more than the fool or prankster in plays because he emerges in a merry, foolish costume, makes absurd and foolish gestures, and is accustomed to deliver funny acts and absurd pranks. In fact, however,

Terveen en Zoon, 1832), 171, 224–5; [an]Ter Gouw, *De Volksvermaken* (Haarlem: De Erven F. Bohn, 1871), 656. See also Angela Vanhaelen, *Comic Print and Theatre in Early Modern Amsterdam. Gender, Childhood and the City*. (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate, 2003), 26, 36–37, 72–76, 85–86, 92.

²⁸ Andreas Gryphius, *Absurda Comica Oder Herr Peter Squentz*, ed. Gerhard Dünnhaupt and Karl-Heinz Habersetzer (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1983), [7]; Beer, *Kleider-Affe*, 171.

²⁹ Christian Weise, *Bäurischer Machiavellus in einem Lust-Spiele vorgestellt* (1681), in *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. John D. Lindberg, 25 vols. (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1976), 11: 30.

³⁰ Jakob and Wilhelm Grimm, *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, 16 vols. (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1854–1960), 2: 1461.

³¹ For further information, see my article "Will Kemp, Thomas Sackville and Pickelhering: A Consanguinity and Confluence of Three Early Modern Clown Personas," *Daphnis* 36 (2007): 463–86.

³² Filamon aus Miseinen [i.e., Samuel Sturm], *Der Geist von Monsieur Pickel-Hering Oder Historischer Blumenthal* (1666), 2nd ed. (n.p., 1670), A3r–v.

he is absolutely in control, being the main actor, producer and director who appears in all scenes, acts and musical pieces, not merely to play the role of the clown, but also to pay close attention to the words and positions of the other actors, so that if anyone should flub his lines or make an error in the presentation of the character, he can spring in and conceal the error with a merry prank, so that the spectators do not notice it. For this reason he must memorize the entire play or comedy, including the order of appearance and names of the figures, as well as what they present and their lines.]

Another function not mentioned explicitly above is to make sure that the actors leave the stage at the right time, as Esau's cook, Refänel, comments³³: "Fürwahr / wenn ein Pickelhäring die Personen nicht manchemahl vom Theatro schaffen könnte / sie wüsten nicht wie sie mit Ehren davon kämen" (Indeed, if a Pickelhering could not get the actors to leave the stage on occasion, they would have no idea how to exit with their honor intact).

While some scholarly attempts have been made to explain the still nebulous origins of this ever-evolving comic persona, scant attention has been paid to what was purportedly his final appearances in German literature published in the last quarter of the seventeenth century, yet the works of Weise along with plays that appeared anonymously such as the *Tugend- und Liebesstreit* (The Battle of Love and Virtue, 1677) or Christoph Kormart's *Timocrates* (1683) as well as the novels of Beer, Printz, and Kuhnau which Heidegger unjustly denigrated as nothing but "in loser Sprach beschribne Comoedien" (plays written in unrhymed language, i.e., prose).³⁴ provide many refreshing details that help paint a more complete picture of this highly acclaimed street performer and stage figure.

Despite the continued interest in stage jigs as afterpieces as well as in the singing and/or dancing clown, the memory of his English origins had for the most part receded to become supplanted more and more by the figure of a generic clown. This is especially apparent in the reference to the Roman Emperor Caligula's kissing a "Pickelhering,"³⁵ or in the conflation of the Pickelhering,³⁶ the stereotypical Englishman, with Jean Potage, the stereotypical Frenchman.³⁷ In an anonymously published play from 1675, for example, the list of characters includes

³³ Christian Weise, *Esau und Jacob* (1696), in *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. John D. Lindberg, 25 vols. (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1976), 8: 363.

³⁴ Gotthard Heidegger, *Mythoscopia romantica oder Discours von den so benannten Romans* (1698), ed. Walter Ernst Schäfer (Bad Homburg: Verlag Gehlen, 1968), 19.

³⁵ Gottfried Vockerodt, *Mißbrauch der freyen Künste / Insonderheit der Music*. . . (1697), in Johann Beer, *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Ferdinand van Ingen and Hans-Gert Roloff, 12 vols. (Bern: Lang, 2005), 12.1: 177.

³⁶ Günther Hansen, *Formen der Commedia dell' Arte in Deutschland* (Emsdetten: Verlag Lechte, 1984), 55.

³⁷ For more on this clown figure, see my article "Jean Potage: Shedding Light on the French Connection of an Early Modern Clown Persona," *Germanisch-Romanische Monatsschrift* 57 (2007): 227–39.

“Mons. Peckelhering dessen Serviteur [i.e., Proteus’], prologistischer Sequenz und finaler concludens “(Monsieur Pickelhering, his [i.e., Proteus’s] servant, the prolog’s sequel and the concluding remarks at the end)³⁸ yet it is Jean Potage who does the prolog sequel and the epilog. Because the Pickelhering took over certain lazzi, or items of stage business, from Jean Potage, including the hat which could be adapted to any shape, I will treat both from this time period as a single persona.

After the English Players returned to London in 1660, following the restoration of Charles II, they left behind a Pickelhering who would thrive in the troupes of such managers as Carl Andreas Paulsen (ca. 1620–ca. 1679) and his son-in-law, the even more celebrated Johann Velten (1640–ca. 1692). From written records of their performances in Leipzig and Dresden during the 1670s and 1680s it is clear that the Pickelhering continued to star not only in full-length plays, but also in the comic afterpieces. These included tragedies such as *Faust*,³⁹ travesties such as Gryphius’s *Peter Squentz* (1658),⁴⁰ English-based stage jigs such as the popular *Pickelhering in der Kiste* (1620; Pickelhering in the Chest) and even a lost dramatization of an original source for the Grimms’ fairy tale “The Jew in the Thornbush” entitled “Posse vom Mönch und Pickelhäring, eines Bauernsohn mit der Fidel “(Farce of the Monk and Pickelhering, a Peasant’s Son with a Fiddle).⁴¹

Given the references to the Pickelhering in the works under consideration, it would appear that the authors, all of whom had strong ties to Saxony, were very familiar with the persona and had presumably been present at some, if not many, of the performances. Besides, they seem to have been familiar with each other, either directly or through their works: Velten, Weise, and Kuhnau had studied in Leipzig under Professor Johann Adam Scherzer (1628–1683);⁴² Christoph Kormart (1644–1701)⁴³ was born in Leipzig where he also studied before moving to Dresden to work as a lawyer, Beer had travelled extensively and was engaged in a musical

³⁸ *Alamodisch Technologisches Interim Oder: Des Ungeistlichen Geistlichen Statistisch Scheinheiliges Schaffskleid...* (Rappersweil: Henning Liebler, 1675), 5.

³⁹ *Das Leben und Todt des grossen Ertz-Zauberers / D. Johannes Faustus* (1688), theater bill reprinted in Albrecht Schöne, *Das Zeitalter des Barock. Texte und Zeugnisse* (Munich: Beck, 1968), 1056.

⁴⁰ Moritz Fürstenau, *Zur Geschichte der Musik und des Theaters am Hofe der Kurfürsten von Sachsen*, 2 vols. (Dresden: Rudolf Kuntze, 1861), 1: 235; Carl Heine, *Johannes Velten. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des deutschen Theaters im XVII. Jahrhundert* (Halle a. d. S.: Ehrhardt Karras, 1887), 28.

⁴¹ Heine, *Velten*, 28–29. For a list of these playlets, see Heine, *Schauspiel*, 23–24.

⁴² Zedler mentions that Weise’s imitation of Scherzer’s dialect may have cost him an academic career — see Johann Heinrich Zedler, *Grosses vollständiges Universallexicon aller Wissenschaften und Künste*, 68 vols. (Leipzig and Halle: Johann Heinrich Zedler, 1747), 54: 1060, <http://www.zedler-lexikon.de>, 543 (last accessed on January 30, 2010).

⁴³ For more on Kormart, see the introduction to my reprint of his adaptation *Polyeuctus oder Christlicher Märtyrer* (1669), ed. Robert J. Alexander (Bern: Lang, 1987), 11–136.

feud with Printz, while Kuhnau was a student of Weise's at the Zittau Gymnasium where, in 1682, he performed a role in one of Weise's Biblical dramas.⁴⁴

In most of the narrative and dramatic texts, the comic figure uses his own name or has been given an individual name such as Allegro, Caraffa, Ciarletto, Courage, Jucundo, Spizwiz, or Tritaeus, while still clearly being designated as the Pickelhering. In a few of Weise's comedies, figures such as Fimperlefamperle, Flinckfleck and Ziribiziribo (the Spanish name "Ziribo Ziribi" with first and last names reversed⁴⁵) manifest the same functions and characteristics of the Pickelhering⁴⁶ and will consequently be included in the discussion.

From the comments and portrayals in the texts from 1675–1700 it is clear that in the years following the publication of Sturm's tome, the function of the Pickelhering as director has all but disappeared, but he is still largely responsible for the financial welfare of the company, which entailed the effective marketing of the repertoire and the full engagement of his comic talents for the maximum entertainment of diverse audiences, both as a stage clown and a narrator of amusing anecdotes.

While keeping in mind that play performances were not permitted on Sundays, we may assume, based on similar descriptions, that the following episode from Printz's first novel is a realistic depiction of how the Pickelhering attracted the attention of the masses⁴⁷:

Als der Sontag kam / schlug unser Greger [Pickelhering in a rope dancer's company] in fast allen Gassen Zettel an / ohn gefehr dieses Inhalts: Kund und zu wissen sey allen Liebhabern fremder Künste und Geschwindigkeiten / daß hier ankommen ein berühmter und kunstreicher Seiltäntzer und Taschenspieler / welcher heute um vier Uhr nach Mittag seine Künste ums Geld zu weisen auff dem Rathhause / von einem Edlen / Ehrenvesten und Wohlweisen Rath hiesiger Stadt / Erlaubnis bekommen. Und 1. wird zu sehen seyn ein künstlicher Tantz auf dem Seil / auf Eyern / und mit angebundenen blossen Degen. 2. Allerley künstliche Sprünge / durch den Reifen über 12. blancke Degen und viel andere. 3. Eine Jungfrau / die 140. Fäden in stätigem umdrehen in eine Nadel einfädnen wird. 4. Allerhand Geschwindigkeiten aus der Taschen. 5. Eine schöne Comödie von dem reichen Mann / und armen Lazaro.⁴⁸ 6. Ein

⁴⁴ James Hardin, ed., Johann Kuhnau, *Der Schmid seines eigenen Glückes* (1695), in *Ausgewählte Werke*, 3 vols. (Bern: Peter Lang, 1992), 1: 18*.

⁴⁵ This also happens in Weise's *Bäurischer Machiavellus* where the name of the town "Querlequitsch" can be read as "Quirlequetsche" (i.e., an insignificant place peopled with blockheads).

⁴⁶ Fimperlefamperle, for example, functions as a merry servant, a messenger, a Master of Ceremonies, a play director, and he engages in the sexual innuendo, puns, cursing, and singing associated with the Pickelhering.

⁴⁷ Wolfgang Caspar Printz, *Güldner Hund / Oder Ausführliche Erzählung / wie es dem sogenannten Cavalier aus Böhmen...in einen Hund verwandelt worden* (1675), in *Ausgewählte Werke*, ed. Helmut K. Krause, 3 vols. (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1979), 1: 36.

⁴⁸ This play was in the repertoire of the English Players as early as 1608; see Orlene Murad, *The*

künstliches Ballet von 4. Mohren. 7. Allerhand Künste von einem Hund / welcher tantzen / Bier und Wein trincken / und unzehlbare Künste kan. Wer nun Lust und Liebe hat / diese obbesagte / und noch viel andere Kunststücken zu sehen / der verfüge sich um 4. Uhr nach Mittag auf das Rathhauß / so wird er um drey Polnische Groschen wohl contentiert werden. Als die Leute aus der Vesper kommen / nahm unser Pickelhering / welcher sich gebührender massen ausgekleidet / eine Trompete / satzte sich auff ein Pferd und ritte blasend die Stadt auf und ab / die Leute herzu zu locken.

[When Sunday arrived, our Greger (Pickelhering in a rope dancer's company) tacked up flyers in almost every street, containing more or less the following content: Let it be known to all lovers of foreign arts and sleight-of-hand-tricks that a famous and skillful rope dancer and conjurer who will demonstrate his abilities in return for money at City Hall has received official permission to do this from the Noble, Honorable and Wise Council of this city. The following will be presented: 1. An artistic dance on the rope on eggs and with naked swords attached to his side can be seen; 2. All kinds of artistic jumps through a hoop and over twelve bare swords and much more; 3. A young lady who will thread one hundred and forty threads into a needle while turning them continuously; 4. All kinds of conjuring tricks; 5. A well-acted play about the rich man and poor Lazarus; 6. An artistic ballet involving four moors; 7. All kinds of tricks by a dog which can dance, drink beer and wine and perform countless more tricks. Whoever is interested in seeing the above-mentioned tricks and many more, should go at 4 p.m. to City Hall and will be well rewarded for his three Polish coins. When the people came out of vespers, our Pickelhering, who had meanwhile dressed appropriately, took a trumpet, mounted a horse and rode back and forth through the town, blowing the trumpet in order to attract the attention of the townspeople.]

A few years later Beer provided a similar example, but in this one a Pickelhering, or generic clown, who is shortly thereafter identified as "Jean Potage," is described as riding backwards on a mule, the typical position for the cuckold with whom our clown is often associated⁴⁹:

Ich habe mein Tage gehört: Ein Narr macht viel Narren" / sagte Fidelino, als er eine grosse Menge / nicht allein Jungens / sondern auch grosse Narren / die Strasse herunter kommen / und einem närrischen Pickelheringe nachlauffen sahe. Dieser Mons. Potage ritt auff einen Maulesel rücklings / und hatte den Schwantz ins Maul genommen / fast wie man an theils Orten die Huren hinaus pauckt / oder wie zu Rom die Pasqvillanten bestraffet werden. Sein Habit war aus sieben und siebenzigerley Tuche / und zu seiner Krause ein gantzer Ballen Regal-Papier / des Hutes zu geschweigen / welches ein weisser Filtz und so groß war / die Rebellen in Ungarn

English Comedians at the Habsburg Court in Graz 1607–1608. Salzburg Studies in English Literature. Elizabethan and Renaissance Studies, 81 (Salzburg: Institut für Englische Sprache und Literature, 1978), 70–72.

⁴⁹ Johann Beer, *Die andere Ausfertigung neu-gefangener Politischer Maul-Affen* (1683), in *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Ferdinand van Ingen and Hans-Gert Roloff, 12 vols. (Bern: Peter Lang, 1997), 9: 74.

hätten eine General-Musterung drauff anstellen können. Ein Kerl in rother Lieberey gieng hinter her / und warff teutsche Zettel in die Häuser.

[“I have always heard that it takes only one fool to make many fools,” said Fidelino, when he saw a large crowd, made up not just of young people, but also of adult fools, coming down the street, following a clownish Pickelhering. This Monsieur Potage rode backwards on an ass and had its tail clenched between his teeth, in the same manner as whores are driven out of some towns, or as slanderers are punished in Rome. His costume consisted of seventy seven different pieces of cloth, and for a ruff he wore a entire roll of shelf-paper, to say nothing of his hat which was of white felt and so large that the Hungarian rebels could have held a general assembly on the brim. A fellow in red livery walked behind him and threw flyers in German into the houses.]

The fictional theater bill being “posted” represents a wonderful parody of the bills of the time and is, to my knowledge, a unicum:

Eine schöne lustige Tragoedie
Von einem Ehr-vergeßnen Schelm /
Dem Wohl-Ehrenvesten / Vor-Achtbaren und Mannvesten Herrn /
Herrn Ibrahim von Sultan / auff Constant/Tinopel / Algiers und Babylon Erbherrn etc.
wolbestalten Türkischen Käyser der Ämbtere Jerusalem und Jericho /
In Griechen-Land und klein Asien regierenden Bürgemeister /
Zu Tunis und Tripoli Gerichts-Verwalter /
Canonico zu Alt- und Neu-Troja /
Hochansehnlichen Stadt-Physico zu Egypten und der Landen von Alcair biß Cairo etc.
etc. etc.
Unserm besonders hochgeehrten und abgesagtem Feinde:
Wie derselbe ein gottloß Leben geführet / und hernach ein schrecklich Ende vor seinem
Tode genommen.
So allen Liebhabern / Frauen und Jungfrauen zu hertzlichen Trost und Kurtzweil
Heute dato umb 4. Uhr nach Mittage repraesentiret werden.
Beliebts Messieurs, so finden sie sich schuldigster massen auff der Römischen Strassen
im Comoedien-Hause ein.
Wir sind englische Komödianten.
P.S. Wir haben einen neuen Pickelhering / der wird heute seine Probe spielen. Ist von
Ansehen ein guter Narr / er soll im Dienste bleiben.
Theophilactus de Angliâ, Comoedien-Printz
[An aesthetically pleasing, merry tragedy
About a dishonorable rogue,
The Honorable, Highly Respectable and Manly Gentleman
Mr. Ibrahim of Sultan, Ruler of Constant/Tinopel, Algiers and Babylon etc.,
Well-established Turkish Emperor and Administrator of Jerusalem and Jericho,

The Presiding Mayor in Greece and Asia Minor,
 The Magistrate of Tunis and Tripoli,
 The Canon of Old and New Troy,
 The Highly Respected City Doctor of Egypt from Alcair to Cairo etc., etc., etc.
 Our especially esteemed and formidable enemy:
 How he lived a godless life and afterwards suffered a horrible fate before his death.
 This play will be presented today at four p.m.,
 For the sincere consolation and merriment of all lovers and ladies both married and
 unmarried.
 If you please, gentlemen, please come, as you most definitely should, to the playhouse
 on Roman Street.
 We are English Players.
 P.S. We have a new Pickelhering who will do his rehearsal today. He looks like a good
 fool, so we will keep him.
 Theophilactus of England, Company Director]

This advertisement for a performance of a tragedy by Daniel Caspar von Lohenstein entitled *Ibrahim Sultan* (1673)⁵⁰ engenders laughter in a variety of ways: plays were never dedicated to tyrants, and the ignorance of geography and genre distinctions, the selection of inappropriate titles, and the breakdown of the name “Constant/Tinopel” are highly reminiscent of a subtext, namely Gryphius’s very popular travesty *Peter Squentz* (1658) where literal-minded amateurs reveal their abysmal ignorance about the contemporary theater, genre designations, and courtly etiquette, while their “poet”⁵¹ has no idea of what constitutes correct syllabication. The actors call themselves “englische Komödianten” (English Players) as a marketing ploy, yet the Players had long since returned to England. Moreover, no company of professional actors would be so naive as to reveal that the principal attraction, the Pickelhering, is totally inexperienced.

Another means of eliciting laughter was the physical appearance of the clown. Ugliness and disability, for example, could be turned to advantage if humor were present. The celebrated English clown of the 1580s, Dick Tarleton, could cause laughter simply by poking his head through the curtains before the performance began and squinting, which in combination with his flat nose, resulted in a “swine-faced” visage.⁵² In the Bierfiedler comedy from 1691, the Pickelhering, played by

⁵⁰ Since the Carl Andreas Paulsen troupe performed Lohenstein’s earlier drama, *Ibrahim Bassa* (1653), it is possible that *Ibrahim Sultan* was also in its repertoire—for the first play, see Eike Pies, *Prinzipale. Zur Genealogie des deutschsprachigen Berufstheaters vom 17. bis 19. Jahrhundert* (Ratingen, Düsseldorf, and Kastellaun: Aloys Henn, 1973), 273.

⁵¹ See Weise, *Tobias*, for a similar satire on the sixteenth-century *Meistersinger*.

⁵² David Wiles, *Shakespeare’s Clown: Actor and Text in the Elizabethan Playhouse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 17.

Bocks-Märten, refers to his face in similar terms: "Und hab ein Goschen / wie ein Sau" (And have a gob like that of a swine),⁵³ and it stands to reason that most actors who assumed the role would have a stomach of Bacchus-like proportions, a so-called "Herings-Bauch" (herring's belly).⁵⁴ This was definitely the case with the Pickelhering, Morohn, who refers explicitly to his "fettwanzigsten Leib" (corpulent body).⁵⁵

Another source of merriment was undoubtedly the costume of this Pickelhering/Jean Potage hybrid, namely the white felt hat that could be transformed into whatever form was desired, the ridiculously large and anachronistic ruff, and the jacket composed of many different pieces of cloth. In the title engraving to a novel by Beer,⁵⁶ we are also shown a Jean Potage, but one who is depicted in a traditional *commedia dell'arte* costume,⁵⁷ including the elongated brim on the front of a hat that is decorated with two rooster feathers (the rooster being associated with lechery and cuckoldry⁵⁸), a short cape or tabarino on the right shoulder, a wooden sword, and a shoe with a noisemaker.⁵⁹ Another picture to escape Hansen's otherwise thorough attention is a more realistic portrayal of a Pickelhering in the title engraving to a later novel⁶⁰: here he is wearing a Jean Potage hat with a cock's feather, as was often the case in this period,⁶¹ a ruff, a jerkin that has straight lines on one side and diagonal lines symbolizing his tendency to go against the grain on the other, trousers to mid-calf with the same alternating stripes, and a wooden sword. A picture of a Pickelhering

⁵³ Printz, *Battalus*, 457. This is an example of the free association of the Pickelhering who clearly can rhyme when he wants to. His source is a line by the Sauhirt/Schultheiß who is describing his wife, but using her own words – see *Das Lalebuch*, ed. Stefan Ertz (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1998), 71, 74.

⁵⁴ Beer, *Kleider-Affe*, 164.

⁵⁵ *Tragi Comoedia*, in *Schauspiele der englischen Komödianten*, 222.

⁵⁶ Johann Beer, *Der politische Bratenwender worinnen enthalten allerhand politische Kunstgriffe vermittelt welcher der Eigennutz heutiges Tages fast von jedermann gesucht wird* (Leipzig: Weidmann, 1682). The title engraving is reproduced by James Hardin in *Johann Beer. Eine beschreibende Bibliographie*. Bibliographien zur deutschen Barockliteratur; 2 (Bern: Francke Verlag, 1983), [75].

⁵⁷ For similar pictures from mid-century, see Hansen, *Formen*, 45. The hat is very reminiscent of that of Capitano Fracasso (based on the drawings of Jacques Callot) and is not the transmutable headgear usually associated with Jean Potage.

⁵⁸ Eva Kimmich, *Des Teufels Werber: Mittelalterliche Lasterdarstellung und Gestaltungsformen der Fastnacht*. *Artes populares*, 11 (Frankfurt a. M.: Peter Lang, 1986), 87. Matthias Deltgen, „Der Hahnrei. Versuch einer Darstellung eines komischen Typus im deutschen Lustspiel des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts,“ Ph.D. diss. University of Cologne 1966, *passim*.

⁵⁹ There is also a picture of a Pickelhering wearing hobnails on his right foot in an anonymous work entitled *Deutscher Pickelhering auff dem Frantzösischen Schavot / Oder Ausbündiges Muster einer Teutschen Version/ Worüber der gelehrte Leser was zu lachen/ der des Lateins Unkündige aber was zuverwundern haben wird* (Leiden: n.p., n.d. [ca. 1670],), title engraving. Peasants often used horseshoe nails for their heavy shoes.

⁶⁰ Johann Beer, *Kleider-Affe*.

⁶¹ Hansen, *Formen*, 44–45.

from 1665,⁶² perhaps a likeness of Christoph Blümel,⁶³ shows a similar, striped costume but with trousers that go down to the ankles, a fact attested to by Weise when he talks of “die langen Pickelherings-Hosen biß auff die Knöchel” (long Pickelhering trousers that reached all the way down to the ankles).⁶⁴ Another actor of this comic persona, Ferdinand Ägidius Paulsen, is portrayed in 1685 wearing a ruff and a diagonally striped jacket with similarly striped trousers that reached down to his ankles, whereas Christian Janetschky, who played the Pickelhering in the Velten troupe, wore a ruff and a striped jacket, but with the short breeches that were fashionable in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.⁶⁵

Although the engravings are not in color, Beer does mention that yellow, the color of contempt and shame, is applied to Pickelherings (such as Spizwiz⁶⁶), rogues, and Jews.⁶⁷ As the color of the Other, it can moreover include cuckolds, prostitutes, unfaithful wives, foreigners, traitors, cowards and heretics.⁶⁸ Beer goes on to point out that in earlier centuries Pickelherings (here clearly a generic term) wore trousers with alternating colors such as yellow and green (fertility), or red (sexuality), and blue (foolishness).⁶⁹ A famous painting by Frans Hals from around 1628 entitled “Monsieur Peeckelhaering”⁷⁰ does indeed reveal a red and yellow costume, denoting fickleness and sexuality. Yet the Pickelhering did not have to wear a specific fool’s costume like the one donned by Allegro⁷¹ or the exaggerated

⁶² Hansen, *Formen*, 50. A picture of the Pickelhering with an almost identical costume is included in the title engraving to Filamon, *Geist*.

⁶³ Blümel was a Silesian student in the George Jolly troupe in the 1650s. He adapted a play containing a Pickelhering entitled *Der Jude von Venetien* (ca. 1662), printed in *Das Schauspiel der Wanderbühne*, ed. Willi Flemming. Deutsche Literatur. Sammlung literarischer Kunst- und Kulturdenkmäler in Entwicklungsreihen. Reihe 13: Barock. Barockdrama; 3 (Leipzig: P. Reclam jun., 1931). He was later with the Innsbruck Players – see Pies, *Prinzipale*, 52–53. The engraving depicts a scene from a performance by this troupe.

⁶⁴ Christian Weise, *Die drey Hauptverderber in Teutschland* (n.p. [1672]), in *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Hans-Gert Roloff, 25 vols. (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2006), 17: 49.

⁶⁵ Hansen, *Formen*, 51. For more on Paulsen and Janetschky, see Helmut G. Asper, *Hanswurst. Studien zum Lustigmacher auf der Berufsschauspielerbühne in Deutschland im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert* (Emsdetten: Lechte, 1980), 29–32, 233–34.

⁶⁶ My example is taken from Christian Weise, *Lust-Spiel von der verkehrten Welt* (1684), in *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. John D. Lindberg (Berlin and New York, 1986), 12.1: 247.

⁶⁷ Beer, *Kleider-Affe*, 196–97.

⁶⁸ Lever, *Zepter*, 45–46. Lever’s association of yellow with saffron and madness is very interesting. Sulphur, however, is also yellow and would connect the Pickelhering and others with the comic devil tradition.

⁶⁹ Beer, *Kleider-Affe*, 238.

⁷⁰ Kassel, Staatliche Museen, Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister. A second painting with the same model but entitled “Mulatto” is on display at the Museum der bildenden Künste in Leipzig, <http://www.art-wallpaper.com/10965/Hals+Frans/The+Mulatto> (last accessed on Jan. 30, 2010).

⁷¹ Christian Weise, *Von den Neapolitanischen Rebellen Masaniello* (1683), in *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. John D. Lindberg, 25 vols. (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1971), 1: 265.

make-up worn by an earlier Pickelhering;⁷² he could, with impunity, transgress class and gender boundaries by dressing up as a king, a nobleman, a "French" dandy,⁷³ a learned doctor or a woman, but he could never conceal his foolish essence which would sooner or later be betrayed by his words and/or actions.

As the mediator between the fictitious world of the stage and the real world of the audience, the Pickelhering, with his extemporizing abilities and suggestive body language, is moreover in an ideal position to provoke laughter directly by inviting the young ladies for a tête-à-tête behind scenes or lampooning some individual publicly. In addition, he is responsible for the prolog and the epilog, dramatic elements from the sixteenth century that no longer had a place in the new theater of illusion. In the Bierfiedler comedy, for example, the role is assumed by one of the professional actor-musicians who immediately chides the tavern fiddlers for forgetting the prolog and offers himself in their place! This immediately sets the right frame of mind for the audience or reader toward Pechmann and his group of amateurs whose play within the narrative context is a lively re-run of the Pyramus-and-Thisbe situation in Gryphius's *Peter Squentz*, and one that ends similarly with disastrous results, and a tip.

In addition, the reaction to the Pickelhering could be intensified by his facial expressions and grimaces that are associated in particular with chimpanzees, but about which very little is known owing to the ephemeral nature of the performances. He may also just jump out from behind the curtains at the beginning of the play⁷⁴ and make what was presumably a comic bow, one that was synonymous with his name—the cantor in Beer's *Kleider-Affe* (Fashion Dandy), for example, "machte zugleich einen Pikelhäring" (made a bow at the same time).⁷⁵ He could also enter, laughing hysterically, as in the Bierfiedler comedy⁷⁶; or, with

⁷² *Tugend- und Liebesstreit* (1677), in *Schauspiele der englischen Komödianten*, ed. Wilhelm Creizenach. Deutsche National-Litteratur, 23 (1888; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1967), 102. In a Dutch performance from 1660, the Pickelhering is described as wearing white-face; see W[iebe] Hogendoorn, "Leiden in last op de planken," *Jaarboekje voor geschiedenis en oudheidkunde van Leiden en omstreken* 60 (1968): 65–85; here 71.

⁷³ Beer, *Kleider-Affe*, 180, mentions that the French wore stockings on their arms and doublets for trousers. He uses the term "Politischer Pickelkering" frequently to designate a courtier or anyone else for that matter who has adopted French fashion. Incidentally, the title picture to Weise's comedy *Lustspiel von der Verkehrten Welt* depicts the subversive figure of Alamode satirizing precisely this type of fashion. It is not a portrayal of the Pickelhering in this play, as claimed by Eggert; see Walther Eggert, *Christian Weise und seine Bühne* (Berlin and Leipzig: Walter de Gruyter, 1935), facing 78.

⁷⁴ *Interim*, 15.

⁷⁵ Johann Beer, *Der kurtzweilige Bruder Blau-Mantel* (1700), in *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Ferdinand van Ingen and Hans-Gert Roloff, 12 vols. (Bern: Peter Lang, 2002), 10: 232.

⁷⁶ *Printz, Battalus*, 428.

his acrobatic skills, he might well engage in some antic, such as scratching his right ear with the toe of his left foot, before priming the audience with his laughter.⁷⁷

In addition to these individual cases, we have stock lazzi such as peering through the curtains while off stage,⁷⁸ peeping through fingers like a child,⁷⁹ talking to or stealing from the dead,⁸⁰ being stolen from,⁸¹ checking out the mouth of the bride⁸² or potential servant,⁸³ being turned in the right direction when facing away from the audience, and soliciting sympathy and/or diverting attention away from an unpleasant situation, as is described by Torindus in the following anecdote relating to the musical charlatan Caraffa⁸⁴:

Ich gläube gewiß / daß / wenn wir seine [Caraffa's] Hand auffbinden solten / wir eben so viel dran finden würden / wie jener Artzt in der Comœdie an des Pickelherings Fingern antraff. Es hatte der poßirliche Kerl alle Finger mit unzehlig viel Dieten besteecket / und gab vor / er hätte einen verzweiffelten Schaden. Wenn der Artzt eine Diète abzog / so schrie er immer / als wenn ihn das Leben dran hienge / ja es kan kein Schwein so arg quiecken / wenn es geschlachtet wird / als er es dabey machte. Allein / so wenig Blut als sich in der ersten Diète finden ließ / (denn sie sahe gantz weiß und gut aus;) So wenig und noch weniger fand der Artzt an den Fingern / nachdem er sich mit dem losen Kerl lange gemartert / und die Dieten / derer über 100. Stücken seyn mochten / abgeschelet hatte.

[I believe for sure that if we were to unbandage his [Caraffa's] hand we would find just about as much as that doctor in the play found when examining the fingers of the Pickelhering. The comical fellow had covered all his fingers with innumerable bandages and claimed to be in extreme distress. Whenever the doctor pulled off a bandage, he kept screaming as if his life were on the line. Indeed, no pig can squeal worse when it is being slaughtered than he did. However, there was little or no blood on the first bandage which still looked white and unblemished, and the same amount of blood or even less was found by the doctor on the fingers after he had peeled off the remaining one hundred or more bandages while putting up all the while with the shenanigans of this frivolous character.]

In a similar case Pickelhering has wrapped his head in a towel and is simulating an illness in order to divert attention away from bills accrued in his master's name

⁷⁷ Beer, *Maulaffe*, 76.

⁷⁸ *Tragi Comoedia*, in *Schauspiele der englischen Komödianten*, 228.

⁷⁹ Nicolaus Adam Strungk, *Floretto* ([Hamburg 1683]), [C4^r].

⁸⁰ *Tragi Comoedia*, in *Schauspiele der englischen Komödianten*, 228, 232–33.

⁸¹ *Tugend- und Liebestreit*, in *Schauspiele der englischen Komödianten*, 122.

⁸² Strungk, *Floretto*, K[1^r].

⁸³ *Tugend- und Liebestreit*, in *Schauspiele der englischen Komödianten*, 104.

⁸⁴ Johann Kuhnau, *Der musikalische Quacksalber* (1700), in *Ausgewählte Werke*, ed. James Hardin, 3 vols. (Bern: Peter Lang, 1992), 3: 112–13.

by the excessive consumption of wine and the ruining of a butter barrel that he had mistaken for a toilet.⁸⁵

The Pickelhering, always eager to engage in pranks and practical jokes, is at times highly reminiscent of Till Eulenspiegel.⁸⁶ In one similar case, the narrator cheats his master out of a bratwurst which he hides in his shirt and replaces on the grill with a "Wulst" (leather piece worn by old women); the master thinks his wife has eaten the sausage and beats her so that the guileful narrator gets off scot-free, earning the praise of his listeners in the novel.⁸⁷

Parody, about which little is known owing to the nature of the medium, provides another cause for laughter. We may assume that the Pickelhering's bows represent an exaggeration of social etiquette,⁸⁸ particularly if based on French customs, and that Dorides is clearly mocking the "melancholy" or love-sickness of the young noblemen at court, and Nabal the lamentations of Tamar over her useless virginity, when each appears in a black "Trauermantel" (coat of mourning).⁸⁹ The same applies to Morohn who parodies proper sword strokes with his "wunderliche Possen" (absurd pranks)⁹⁰ and to Allegro whose army of infant fools with their pipes and drums mocks military formations and music.

The Pickelhering also abuses social norms when he addresses or deals with his superiors in an irreverent manner. For example, Courage reverses the comment that smart children become old fools, thus insulting the Spanish Ambassador;⁹¹ the Pickelhering seats himself in the lap of the king⁹²; or ridicules the king as in the following observation⁹³: "Herr Hertzog, was ist das vor ein Mann, der dort hinten sitzt? Er siehet so trotzig auß, als ob er ihrer schon 9. gefressen und der zehnde stecke ihm noch im Halse" (Mr. Duke, what kind of a man is the one sitting back there? He looks very defiant as if he has eaten nine [men] already and the tenth is still stuck in his throat).

Further examples of parody can be found in the burlesque leaping, dancing, and singing or music of the Pickelhering. Ever since he had first appeared, he was associated with his jumping ability.⁹⁴ The narrator in a novel by Beer, for example,

⁸⁵ *Tugend- und Liebesstreit*, in *Schauspiele der englischen Komödianten*, 94–95.

⁸⁶ For a somewhat similar prank, see *Ein kurzweilig Lesen von Dil Ulenspiegel* (1515), ed. Wolfgang Lindow (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2001), 113–16.

⁸⁷ Beer, *Kleider-Affe*, 161–63.

⁸⁸ *Tugend- und Liebesstreit*, in *Schauspiele der englischen Komödianten*, 104.

⁸⁹ [Christoph Kormart], *Der unbekannte Liebhaber oder beliebte Feind Timocrates* ([Dresden: Michael Günther, 1683]), 2; Carlot Gottfrid Reuling, *Die komische Figur in den wichtigsten deutschen Dramen bis zum Ende des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart: C. J. Göschen'sche Verlagshandlung, 1890), 158.

⁹⁰ *Tragi Comoedia*, in *Schauspiele der englischen Komödianten*, 227.

⁹¹ Weise, *Ancrè*, 147.

⁹² *Tugend- und Liebesstreit*, in *Schauspiele der englischen Komödianten*, 78.

⁹³ *Tugend- und Liebesstreit*, in *Schauspiele der englischen Komödianten*, 76–77.

⁹⁴ Alexander, *Kemp*, 473.

notes⁹⁵: “Ich kame gleich zu Herr Lorentzen in das Zimmer / als er wie ein Pickelhäring mit dem Glaß Brandwein umb den Tisch herumb sprange” (I went right away to the room where Mr. Lorentz was jumping around a table with a glass of brandy in his hand, just like a Pickelhering), and the stage directions indicate that Flinckfleck,⁹⁶ probably the most sarcastic of Weise’s clowns, as well as the outspoken Pickelhering in *Tugend- und Liebesstreit* make “wunderliche Sprünge” (absurd jumps),⁹⁷ while in the Bierfiedler comedy Bocks-Märten has the same comical effect with his “krumme Sprünge” (clumsy jumps).⁹⁸ And when Courage, a witty Pickelhering in comparison to his father, Potage, attempts a leap and collapses, he does so to the laughter of the audience.⁹⁹ This comic business is further enhanced by the dancing of the two Pickelherings, Tritaeus¹⁰⁰ and Bocks-Märten, with the latter even offering himself as an instructor to the ladies in the audience.¹⁰¹

The dancing was of course accompanied by music. This is certainly no surprise, given that the English stage jigs were still being performed, that there was a strong emerging interest in the *Singspiel* and opera, and that Weise was an accomplished musician on the flute, lute and positive organ while Beer, Kuhnau and Printz were primarily musicians and/or musical directors. The instruments mostly associated with the Pickelhering during the performance were the fiddle, the lute, the flute and the drum: Haso and Moph, for example, play the fiddle,¹⁰² Fimperlefamperle the flute,¹⁰³ and the narrator in Printz’s *Sing- und Klingkunst* mentions that he has witnessed a Pickelhering playing a lute and drum simultaneously in a comedy.¹⁰⁴ Kormart too provides variety by inserting a number of song texts for Dorides, while the references to songs, but without text, by the Alamode Pickelhering, Ziribiziribo, are used to underscore the satirical intentions of the patriotic author, Weise.¹⁰⁵ The Pickelhering remains so much associated with music that Scibilis

⁹⁵ Johann Beer, *Der berühmte Narren-Spital* (1681), in *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Ferdinand van Ingen and Hans-Gert Roloff, 12 vols. (Bern: Peter Lang, 1991), 5: 171.

⁹⁶ Christian Weise, *Der betrogene Betrug* (1690), in *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Hans-Gert Roloff, 25 vols. (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1996), 13: 185.

⁹⁷ *Tugend- und Liebesstreit*, in *Schauspiele der englischen Komödianten*, 104.

⁹⁸ Printz, *Battalus*, 462.

⁹⁹ Weise, *Ancre*, 118.

¹⁰⁰ Wolfgang Caspar Printz, *Musicus magnanimus Oder Pancalus, der Großmüthige Musikant* (1691), in *Ausgewählte Werke*, ed. Helmut K. Krausse, 3 vols. (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1979), 1: 278.

¹⁰¹ Printz, *Battalus*, 462.

¹⁰² Reuling, *Figur*, 159.

¹⁰³ Christian Weise, *Comödie vom Curiositäten-Kräher* (1686), in *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Hans-Gert Roloff, 25 vols. (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1996), 13: 59.

¹⁰⁴ Wolfgang Caspar Printz, *Sing- und Klingkunst* (1690), in *Ausgewählte Werke*, ed. Helmut K. Krausse, 3 vols. (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter), 2: 462.

¹⁰⁵ Weise, *Machiavellus*, 41, 42, 52, 96.

even likens Querlequitsch without a Pickelhering to a marriage without musicians,¹⁰⁶ but if he is the soul of this dystopian town, then Querlequitsch does indeed exist in a spiritual vacuum.

The traditional obsession of the clown with food and drink reappears in all these works. While there are few references to pickled herrings, there are many variants on Klotz-George's memorable comparison¹⁰⁷: "Pickelhäring ist die fürnemste Person im Spiel / er muß das Spiel zieren / wie die Bratwurst das Sauerkraut" (Pickelhering is the most distinguished figure in the play and must adorn the play just as the bratwurst crowns the sauerkraut). Weise himself paraphrases this observation in order to emphasize the importance of the Pickelhering for a comedy¹⁰⁸: "Wer bey dem Spiele den Pickelhering vergessen hat / der ist einen Wirthe zu vergleichen / der zu seinen Kraut-Salate kein Gebratens aufftragen läst" (Whoever forgets the Pickelhering in a play can be compared to a host who serves up sauerkraut without meat). Spizwiz claims to have been raised on bratwurst and sauerkraut,¹⁰⁹ while the witty Fimperlefamperle inverts the master-servant relationship when he states his plans in similar terms¹¹⁰: "Und was ich anstellen werde, das wird die BratWurst auf Herrn Gangolfs SauerKraute seyn" (And what I will do, will be the bratwurst on Mr. Gangolf's sauerkraut).

The craving for food that symbolizes the body and material world, as well as sinfulness, is expressed in similes that reappear throughout the texts, for example¹¹¹: "Das Hertz fieng mir im Leibe vor Freuden an zu zappeln wie ein Lämmer-Schwantz" (My heart began to jump with joy, just like the wagging tail of a lamb). Most Pickelherings are consumed with money as a means of buying food and, above all else, alcohol such as beer, wine, brandy, and even aquavit, with the subsequent drunkenness leading frequently to vomiting, urinating, and diarrhea.¹¹² The servant can moreover simply mirror the master for comic effect as when Tritaeus regurgitates his food out of empathy.¹¹³

There are likewise only sporadic references to anal humor in the plays where terms such as "bestulgängen (to have a bowel movement),¹¹⁴ "Hosenscheißer" (someone who shits his pants),¹¹⁵ "pissen" (to piss),¹¹⁶ and "Labeth

¹⁰⁶ Weise, *Machiavellus*, 62.

¹⁰⁷ Gryphius, *Squentz*, 15.

¹⁰⁸ Quoted by M.A. Katritzky, *Women, Medicine and Theatre, 1550–1750: Literary Mountebanks and Performing Quacks* (Aldershot, Hampshire, and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), 292.

¹⁰⁹ Weise, *Welt*, 156.

¹¹⁰ Weise, *Curiositäten-Krähmer*, 9.

¹¹¹ Beer, *Kleider-Affe*, 158.

¹¹² *Tugend- und Liebesstreit*, in *Schauspiele der englischen Komödianten*, 95.

¹¹³ Printz, *Pancalus*, 271–72.

¹¹⁴ Weise, *Ancre*, 116; *Interim*, 26.

¹¹⁵ *Tragi Comoedia*, in *Schauspiele der englischen Komödianten*, 228.

¹¹⁶ *Tugend- und Liebesstreit*, in *Schauspiele der englischen Komödianten*, 75.

machen" (to fart).¹¹⁷ can be found, although one can of course not discount their presence in the Pickelhering's extemporizations. However, they exist in abundance in the novels, often in combination with practical jokes. These pranks may be relatively harmless as when Volpetta uses soot to blacken the faces of his sleeping companions so that they look like "natürliche Pickelheringe" (natural Pickelherings, i.e., in the comic devil tradition), but leaves one face untouched so that that person will be the scapegoat.¹¹⁸ In other anecdotes which were undoubtedly hilarious at the time but which would probably not appeal as much to an audience today, Pancalus challenges an audience to imitate him crawling on all fours, with a plate in each hand, to a footstool where he picks up a spoon with his mouth. He then replaces the spoon with one covered with chicken feces which Battalus is unfortunate enough to grab with his teeth. In another episode Pancalus tricks a bartender into opening his mouth so that he can insert pig feces. By holding the jaw of the bartender closed, he forces some awful grimaces, much to the delight of the audience.¹¹⁹ Perhaps even more gratifying because it entails a modicum of social justice is the ironic satisfaction derived from smearing the face of an officious local administrator named Bastian Schoß with dung because he has overstepped his bounds in banning cattle from the village at night.¹²⁰

In general, however, the plays eschew this kind of humor and focus more on the bawdy that had accompanied the Pickelhering from the earliest texts,¹²¹ for gluttony, as the sin most associated with the Pickelhering, can lead in turn to lust which in turn was regarded by some of the Church Fathers as the source of all evil.¹²² Apart from the Pickelhering's scarcely veiled invitations to the young women in the audience, references are generally euphemistic and centered around the genitalia: the sausage and the pickled herring both invoke phallic images,¹²³ as do terms such as magnet, pestle, sabre, tail, and key, while the vagina is represented by such euphemisms as North Pole, mortar, sheath, door of hope, keyhole, hole, and butter-pot. The sexualization of a Biblical description of the Promised Land (Exodus 3, 8; Joel 4, 18), while undoubtedly blasphemous for

¹¹⁷ Weise, *Ancre*, 116. The meaning is "to fart," based on the French verb "péter."

¹¹⁸ Printz, *Pancalus*, 200.

¹¹⁹ Printz, *Pancalus*, 167, 170.

¹²⁰ Christian Weise, *Der politische Näscher / Auß unterschiedenen Gedancken hervor gesucht* (1686), in *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Hans-Gert Roloff and Gerd-Hermann Susen, 25 vols. (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2004), 19: 44.

¹²¹ Katritzky, *Women*, 294. Katritzky praises his "verbal dexterity and sexual innuendo as breathtaking in its vulgarity as in its virtuosity." See also my article: "The Language of the Pickelhering," *Germanisch-Romanische Monatsschrift* 52 (2002): 463–76; here 468.

¹²² Kimminich, *Werber*, 54, 68.

¹²³ Marten Jan Bok, "The Artist's Life," *Jan Steen: Painter and Storyteller*, ed. H. Perry Chapman, Wouter Th. Kloek, and Arthur K. Wheelock, Jr. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996), 45.

many, is nonetheless indicative of Kormart's creative humor¹²⁴: "Sie [Clarille] hat ein Land / da Milch und Zucker daraus zu lecken / wann es recht bebauet wird / und ist sie der rechte Laabsal meiner Seelen / wann ihr gebenedeyetes Alabaster Gewölbe / in baulichen Wesen erhalten wird" (She [Clarille] has a field from which milk and sugar can be teased, if it is ploughed properly, and she is the proper sustenance of my soul if her blessed vault of alabaster is kept full of life). This finds already good antecedents in late-medieval poetry.¹²⁵

Although Weise had enjoyed such humor in his student productions, his unequivocal rejection of sexual improprieties and scatological jokes as the tasteless humor of the marketplace and of the lower, uneducated classes may be understandable in that he had just commenced his teaching and administrative career in Zittau, but nevertheless comes across as crassly elitist¹²⁶:

So ist es auch keine Lust / wenn man viel unflätige Redens-Arten oder andere säuische Erzehlungen anführet / und die kothigen Sachen in den Mund nimt / welche niemand gerne an den äußersten Absatze seines Schuches erleiden mag. Den ob gleich etliche aus dem groben und gemeinen Pöbel in solchen Sprichwörtern etwas sonderliches suchen wollen / also daß auch ein Quacksalber mit seinem Pickelheringe die Bauern nie besser zum lachen bewegen kan / als wenn er solche Reden frey heraus fahren lässet

[It's no fun when one introduces many filthy idioms or obscene narratives and thus gives voice to those dirty things that one cannot stand having stuck to the outside heel of one's shoe. Although crude commoners find something special in these sayings so that there is no easier way for a charlatan and his Pickelhering to induce laughter in the peasants than by letting fly with such jokes. . .].

In his school plays, Weise reiterates his moderate position in favor of gentle satire as he sets forth a programmatic agenda based on the twin Horatian goals of *prodesse et delectare*¹²⁷:

Denn wer die Jugend soll zum Schertzen angewöhnen /
Der muß im Spielen keusch / im Possen nützlich seyn;
Er muß den Zucker bloß auf solche Sachen streun /
Darnach sich anderweit gelehrte Geister sehnen.
Es ist ein schlechtes Thun / wenn ein vergiffter Hohn /
Den Nechsten schänden soll / wenn grobe Zoten fliegen /

¹²⁴ Kormart, *Timocates*, 135.

¹²⁵ Cf. Stefan Zeyen, *...daz tet der liebe dorn: Erotische Metaphorik in der deutschsprachigen Lyrik des 12.-14. Jahrhunderts*. Item Mediävistische Studien, 5 (Essen: Item-Verlag, 1996).

¹²⁶ Christian Weise, *Kurtzer Bericht vom Politischen Näscher* (1680), in *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Hans-Gert Roloff, 25 vols. (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2004), 19: 262–63.

¹²⁷ Weise, *Machiavellus*, [6]–7.

Und wenn das Ergernüß die Jugend muß betriegen;
Denn letztlich hat man nichts als Schimpf und Haß davon.

[Whoever wants to expose young people to jokes, must avoid sexual content in plays and offer a moral in farces. He simply needs to add sugar to those serious matters that are otherwise tackled with enthusiasm by learned scholars. It is not right to harm one's neighbor with venomous mockery, to let dirty jokes fly or to offend young people with deceit, for in the end one is reviled or hated for it.]

While comical situations and parody are important sources of laughter, they often take a second place to satire. When Beer's narrator Jan Rebhu states that he will present either "einen Pickel-Häring" or a tragedy,¹²⁸ it is clear that he identifies comedy with the clown, and when Beer himself categorically proclaims that "Satyrica faciunt einen Pickelhäring" (Satires make a Pickelhering) and rephrases Lucretius's overused medical metaphor with "Prudentia est fortissima pillula, man muß sie übergülden" (Prudence is the strongest pill, but it must be coated with gold),¹²⁹ there can be no doubt but that he equates the Pickelhering with satirical comedy, including farce, and that the ultimate goal, at least theoretically, is the moral edification of the (reading) audience. His arch-enemy Printz, on the other hand, points out that the novel *Narrenspital* (1681), for example, is too one-sided, being filled "mit groben Sau-Zoten und Pickelherings-Possen, über welche zwar der Leser lachen muss: Aber ich glaube nicht, daß ein einziger kluger Mensch einen solchen Zoten- und Possenschreiber für etwas rechtschaffenes halten kan" (with crude, dirty jokes and Pickelhering-pranks at which the reader will certainly laugh. However, I do not believe that a single intelligent person will regard the writer of such dirty jokes and pranks as a morally upright person).¹³⁰

The fact that Printz and Vockeroth use the designation "Pickelhering" as a term of abuse when referring to Beer¹³¹ represents a personal form of satire in the Juvenalian tradition known in Germany as "Pasquillantentum" (personal libel), and one that was very much frowned upon, especially in the late seventeenth century. In his preface to the reader dated August 22, 1690, Christian Gryphius, the son of Andreas, underlines this concern when he insists that the following items be excluded at all costs from any dramatizations of his work¹³²: "alle Pickelhärings-

¹²⁸ Johann Beer, *Des Simplicianischen Welt-Kuckers oder Abentheuerlichen Jan Rebhu* (1679), in *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Ferdinand van Ingen and Hans-Gert Roloff, 12 vols. (Bern: Peter Lang, 1981), 1: 213.

¹²⁹ Beer, *Ursus vulpinatur*, 110.

¹³⁰ Wolfgang Caspar Printz, *Vertheidigung des löbl. Schneider-Handwercks wider die greulichen Calumnien des Jean Rebhu* (1745), in *Ausgewählte Werke*, ed. Helmut K. Krausse, 3 vols. (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1979), 2: 166.

¹³¹ Wolfgang Caspar Printz, *Phrynus mitilenaesus, oder Satyrischer Componist* (1696), in *Ausgewählte Werke*, ed. Helmut K. Krausse, 3 vols. (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1979), 1: 222; Beer, *Ursus vulpinatur*, 43, 110.

¹³² Christian Gryphius, *Der Deutschen Sprache unterschiedene Alter und nach und nach zunehmendes*

Possen und höhnisches Durchhecheln vornehmer und um das gemeine Wesen wolverdienter Leute . . ." (all Pickelhering-pranks and the vicious gossip directed at distinguished citizens who have done much for the common good). Even though Weise is not totally innocent of this type of satire, as can be seen in his attacks on the noted pedagogue Johann Amos Comenius (1592–1670) and the idiosyncratic author Philip von Zesen (1619–1689),¹³³ he does, however, tend in general to follow Martial's principle of focusing on human faults rather than the individual¹³⁴: "semperque licebit parcere personis, dicere de vitiis" (Sparing the person and addressing the fault is always permitted).

Much of his humor, as well as that in the novels, is directed at the peasant class and semi-literate types referred to by Beer as "Petersqventzen,"¹³⁵ yet Weise is quick to emphasize that the target of his satire is a social type rather than a class¹³⁶: "Doch was zum Exempel / ein grosser Mann thut / das muß so lange ein Kauffmann gethan haben; was ein Politicus fehlet / das erzehlet man von einem Bauer" (For example, whatever a great man does, must also have been already, done by a merchant; what we cannot say about a politician's deficiencies, we can say about a peasant's). Because of such extreme indirectness, it can sometimes, however, be difficult to discern the actual object of Weise's wrath.

This is, however, not the case when the barbs are directed against the so-called stupidity and gullibility of those peasants and uneducated townspeople who take everything literally, as in the following example¹³⁷:

SIE: Du alberner Tropff / ist er ein Bauer / oder ein Soldat / oder was ist dein Vater?

SAMBELLE: Mein Vater isst meistentheils schwartzes Brot.

SIE: Ich glaub der Jung seye gar angebrannt / wie bist du hierher gekommen?

SAMBELLE: Auf den Füßen.

[SHE: You simpleton. . . is he a peasant or a soldier? What is your father?

SAMBELLE: My father eats pumpernickel most of the time (pun on "ist," "isst").

SHE: I think the boy has a screw loose. How did you get here?

SAMBELLE: On foot.]

And in a play ascribed to Kuhnau, Balba gives Packan too much credit when he asks the latter to desist from his "Pickelherings-Possen"—Packan had namely

Wachstum (1708), ed. Dieter Eggers and James N. Hardin (Bern: Peter Lang, 1985), 8.

¹³³ Heinrich Haxel, *Studien zu den Lustspielen Christian Weises* (Stettin: Ostsee Druck und Verlag, 1932), 81–2.

¹³⁴ Quoted by Haxel, *Studien*, 73.

¹³⁵ Beer, *Weltkucker*, 185.

¹³⁶ Weise, *Bericht*, 312.

¹³⁷ Johann Beer, *Des berühmten Spaniers Francisci Sambelle wolauspolirte Weiber-Hächel* (1680), in *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Ferdinand van Ingen and Hans-Gert Roloff, 12 vols. (Bern: Peter Lang, 1991), 5: 15.

taken the word “Esel” (ass/stupid person) literally and brought the animal rather than the accused into custody!¹³⁸

The Pickelhering, like Till Eulenspiegel to whom he may compare himself,¹³⁹ is usually not depicted as a natural fool, but rather chooses to adopt such a guise when it suits his purposes, e.g., as an evasive tactic rather than answering a question that could get him into trouble. In the following example, he becomes, in Bergsonian terms, something other than human, in this case a mindless automaton, when he repeats the lines of Dardanus¹⁴⁰:

MOROHN: Was soll ich dann sagen?

DARDANUS: Wo die Jungfraw ist hinkommen.

MOROHN: Wo die Jungfraw ist hinkommen.

DARDANUS: Das begehre ich auch von dir zu wissen.

MOROHN: Das begehre ich auch von dir zu wissen.

DARDANUS: Bist du ein Narr?

MOROHN: Bist du ein Narr?

MOROHN: What should I say then?

DARDANUS: Where the young lady went.

MOROHN: Where the young lady went.

DARDANUS: I want to hear that from you.

MOROHN: I want to hear that from you.

DARDANUS: Are you a fool?

MOROHN: Are you a fool?]

Given his own fictitious background as a peasant or a man of rural origins who has found employment as a servant in the city or at court, the Pickelhering can, however, also be the butt of humor. His lack of education is reflected in his ignorance of geography, logic, foreign languages such as Latin, and his social ineptitude which is particularly highlighted in a courtly setting. For example, he addresses those of higher standing with the wrong title, either out of a purported ignorance of the decorum or to flatter: “Monsieur König (Monsieur King),”¹⁴¹ or “Junker König (Young Sir King),”¹⁴² “Eysenveste / und Großgeöhrte Herren” (Iron-Hard and Large-Eared, i.e., Ehrenfeste and Großgeachtete, Honorable and Highly

¹³⁸ Johann Kuhnau, *Der schlimme Causenmacher, denen rechtschaffenen Advocaten / und sonstem einem ieden curiosen Liebhaber zur Belustigung / Denen Bösen aber zur Warnung / In einem Schau=Spiele artig vorgestellt* (Leipzig: Immanuel Tietze, [1701]), 114.

¹³⁹ *Interim*, 35.

¹⁴⁰ *Tragi Comoedia*, in *Schauspiele der englischen Komödianten*, 234.

¹⁴¹ *Der bestrafte Brudermord*, in *Schauspiele der englischen Komödianten*, 177.

¹⁴² *Tugend- und Liebesstreit*, in *Schauspiele der englischen Komödianten*, 78.

Esteemed),¹⁴³ "Schweinhalter" (pig farmer, i.e., Schreinhalter, Treasurer)¹⁴⁴ and "Ihre Claritäten (Your Hexellencies)."¹⁴⁵

Latin expressions are skewered, e.g. in *vltimis capris* (= in *ultimis extremis* = on one's deathbed),¹⁴⁶ while colloquialisms and proverbs from the *genus humile* (colloquial or low style) such as the Latinization of the German proverb "Wer schweigt / sagt Ja dazu" with "Qui tacet consentire videtur" (Whoever keeps quiet, seems to be in acquiescence)¹⁴⁷ represent a reversal of the usual parody of the scholarly *lingua franca*. French terms such as "delectieren" (to delight) appear as "Dyletzen,"¹⁴⁸ and foreign names are digested, if poorly, and then regurgitated in a linguistic form familiar to the Pickelhering, e.g. Amurath = Cammer-Rath = Cammerad (Amurath = political advisor = comrade; untranslatable pun)¹⁴⁹ difficult to understand for non-German speakers. Some of the distorted reproductions are the result of a deliberate misunderstanding, as when the Pickelhering understands "Printz von Cypern" (Prince of Cyprus) as "Printz von der Citter(n)" (Prince of the Cittern)¹⁵⁰ or when Morohn refers to Rosalina with the suggestive, but untranslatable pun "Rosaliegen" (A rose in a lying position)¹⁵¹ At other times, the Pickelhering is simply indulging in his predilection for puns: Flinckfleck mentions his "anschläglichen Kopf(vulnerable head or head full of ideas),¹⁵² Potage puns on the words "Fuchsschwanz/Kuhschwanz" (fox tail/cow's tail), and Weise himself uses the old English pun on "Nobody/Niemand."¹⁵³

In such a theater, inappropriate peasant-like behavior is further satirized by slapstick. It may be verbal in nature and take the form of oaths, in particular variations on the signature oath of the Pickelhering ("Potz tausend Schlapperment"; A thousand curses; literally: God's thousand sacraments) such as "Potz hundert tausend Scheffel voll" (A hundred thousand bushels of curses),¹⁵⁴ "O Potz tausend Flöh" (A thousand fleas),¹⁵⁵ or "potz Schlapperment" (Curses!)¹⁵⁶ In addition, insulting terms such as "Narr" (fool), "Grobian" (crude person) "Rabenaas" (beast) "Sau" (swine), "Esel" (ass), "Teufel" (devil), and the stronger

¹⁴³ Printz, *Battalus*, 458.

¹⁴⁴ Weise, *Ancre*, 90.

¹⁴⁵ Weise, *Machiavellus*, 28.

¹⁴⁶ *Tragi Comoedia*, in *Schauspiele der englischen Komödianten*, 228.

¹⁴⁷ *Interim*, 31.

¹⁴⁸ *Tragi Comoedia*, in *Schauspiele der englischen Komödianten*, 228.

¹⁴⁹ Beer, *Maulaffen*, 77.

¹⁵⁰ *Tugend- und Liebestreit*, in *Schauspiele der englischen Komödianten*, 77.

¹⁵¹ *Tragi Comoedia*, 243.

¹⁵² Weise, *Betrug*, 146. This pun, borrowed from *Peter Squentz*, reappears frequently.

¹⁵³ Weise, *Verkehrte Welt*, 193.

¹⁵⁴ Beer, *Maulaffe*, 30.

¹⁵⁵ *Tugend- und Liebestreit*, in *Schauspiele der englischen Komödianten*, 75.

¹⁵⁶ *Tragi Comedia*, in *Schauspiele der englischen Komödianten*, 225, 229.

"Hundsfoth" (bastard) resurface frequently in the texts. They are often accompanied by onstage fights and other shenanigans involving the Pickelhering. In the production of *Ibrahim Sultan*, for example, the Pickelhering who shows unusual aggressiveness in attacking the sultan with his wooden sword is struck so hard in the face that he turns around nine times;¹⁵⁷ Morohn calls his master Apolonius a fool and hits him on the head;¹⁵⁸ Courage jumps onto the back of his father Potage and twists his ears as he rides him like a horse;¹⁵⁹ Jucundo hits his father in the mouth, while Clarisse slaps both Jucundo and Ephialtes in an operatic adaptation of Weise's earliest play, *Die Triumphirende Keuschheit* (1668).¹⁶⁰ In general, though, Pickelhering is more a man of words than actions. He is a vain, garrulous type who will lie or give evasive answers when cornered, and since he is cowardly by nature he is more likely to take to flight rather than fight. Such self-preservation is consistent with his lack of idealism, including loyalty in most cases, and will elicit laughter, if only because of the blatant dichotomy between words and action.

The character comedy in the plays is accompanied by much satire that is aimed not just at the uneducated or semi-educated peasants and lower urban classes, but also at courtly society. In one of his theoretical works, Weise gives, as an example of his indirect method, his own comedy, *Bäurischer Machiavellus* (1679).¹⁶¹ Although it is set ostensibly in the small town of Querlequitsch, it is intended as a satire on the political life at court,¹⁶² but could just as easily represent any place, including Weise's hometown of Zittau, where people are vying for office.

The satire in most works focuses in general on various aspects of courtly life. The obsession with precedence and genealogy at the Dresden court is reflected in Dorides's fictitious enumeration of his forefathers, including barkeepers and chimneysweeps from various countries, although it turns out subsequently that

¹⁵⁷ Beer, *Maulauffe*, 80. Being turned around is an action associated with the Pickelhering, as the narrator comments when being examined by the lady in a black mask: "... liesse ich mich von ihr / wie ein Pickelhäring / bald hin / bald her drehen" (... I let myself be turned this way and that, just like a Pickelhering)—see Johann Beer, *Des abentheuerlichen Jan Rebhu Ritter Spiridon aus Perusina* (1679), in *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Ferdinand van Ingen and Hans-Gert Roloff, 12 vols. (Bern: Peter Lang, 1992), 2: 93. In Weise's *Verkehrte Welt*, turning around a person indicates a subverted norm or perspective.

¹⁵⁸ *Tragi Comoedia*, in *Schauspiele der englischen Komödianten*, 76.

¹⁵⁹ Weise, *Ancre*, 14.

¹⁶⁰ Strungk, *Floretto*.

¹⁶¹ Weise, *Bericht*, 312.

¹⁶² In an article in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* from March 5, 2004, page 4, entitled "Angela Machiavelli," Heribert Prantl likens the politics of Angela Merkel concerning the election of a new Bundespräsident to the Machiavellian tactics exposed in Querlequitsch. Despite Weise's intentions, Querlequitsch has become synonymous with small-town politics for most readers.

he is actually an orphan.¹⁶³ In another work, the Pickelhering lampoons the accumulation of titles and outdoes even the officious Peter Squentz with the following absurd, yet comical sequence¹⁶⁴: "Der Fürtreffliche / Nette / Schöne / Eysenveste / Großgeöhrte / Vielbenahmte Dominus, Signor, Herr / Don, Monsieur, Jean Potage von Pickelhering / auff Nirgendsheim / Schmarutz=Hausen Kein Dorff und Bettlerweil etc. Wohlbestallter Kurtzweiliger Tisch- und Hoff-Rath des Freyherrn von Naschberg" (The Excellent, Nice, Handsome, Iron-Hard, Large-Eared, Much-Mentioned Lord, Signor, Don, Mr., Monsieur Jean Potage of Pickelhering of Nowhere, Parasites-Home, No Village and Beggars' Abode etc. Well-Established Merry Court Jester of the Baron of Sweet Tooth-Mountain). Courage wants to be appointed "Commendanten über die Spitzbuben" (Commander of the Rascals) or "Registrator der betrogenen Klugkeit" (Register of Wisdom Deceived),¹⁶⁵ for such titles imply sinecures such as those created with taxpayer money for the unsuccessful candidates for the office of Pickelhering in *Bäurischer Machiavellus*, and are totally consonant with his and his father's anti-work ethic.¹⁶⁶ Incidentally, it should be pointed out that Dorides is possibly referring to the hundred positions created at the Dresden court between 1666–1676¹⁶⁷ when he notes laconically¹⁶⁸: "Die Chargen lauffen bey Hofe wunderlich / und nehmen bald ab und zu wie der Mond" (Offices at court take an odd course and increase or decrease from time to time like the moon).

The court is also lambasted by the Pickelhering for its lack of morality¹⁶⁹: "Es katert und schnäbelt sich ohne das überal an unsern Hofe" (Moreover, there is a much kissing and sex at our court). And in *Pancalus*, Tritaeus symbolizes the inverted world of the Pickelhering when he replaces the Marchese for a short period and appoints courtiers to his new "administration," based on such individual vices as flattery, lying, stealing and the ability to exploit peasants,¹⁷⁰ thus exposing the shadowy side of aristocratic politics. But perhaps more significant are the critiques of court policy offered by the licensed fools in Weise's comedies who speak the truth with impunity. Allegro as the *vox autoris* (voice of the author), for example, mentions how higher taxes on basic food items are a root cause of the rebellion in Naples¹⁷¹: "Ach wer das Werck mit den hohen Zöllen

¹⁶³ Alexander, *Language*, 473.

¹⁶⁴ Printz, *Battalus*, 462.

¹⁶⁵ Weise, *Ancre*, 73, 91.

¹⁶⁶ Weise, *Ancre*, 57.

¹⁶⁷ Carl Eduard Vehse, *Geschichte der deutschen Höfe seit der Reformation: Geschichte der Höfe des Hauses Sachsen*, 48 vols. (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1854), 31: 31, 102.

¹⁶⁸ Kormart, *Timocrates*, 156.

¹⁶⁹ Kormart, *Timocrates*, 125.

¹⁷⁰ Printz, *Pancalus*, 275–76.

¹⁷¹ Weise, *Masaniello*, 170.

etwas niedriger gespannt hätte / der dürffte sich nicht in das Castell als wie eine arme Bestie in ihr Fuchslotch verkriechen" (If only whoever is responsible for the high taxes had not overdone things, they would not have had to seek refuge in the fortress, like a fox escaping into its hole). Weise's goal is pre-eminently didactic in that he seeks to give his youthful actors as well as those in the audience who will eventually accede to governmental positions insight into the strong impact that an ill-considered social policy can have on the common people and the country. In addition, Allegro exposes the hypocrisy of those nobles who have no intention of keeping their promises, the haughty attitude of Masaniello's family, and the tyrannical behavior of Masaniello himself in the court scene in the final act. In a very witty scene in another tragedy by Weise, *Courage* even criticizes the king to his face by calling him the servant of Ancre and placing his name in his Fools' Registry, whereupon the monarch, not wishing to hear any more, throws the book in *Courage's* face.¹⁷²

The empty language of the court is also parodied in the long-winded and often nonsensical monologs of Pickelherings such as Morohn and Dorides who operate on the foolish assumption that whoever talks the longest is the wisest,¹⁷³ and Dorides will even expand various rhetorical devices ad absurdum when playing one of his many diverse roles. This is particularly true of the figurative language used by young noblemen during courting, as this hilarious example of mixed metaphors shows¹⁷⁴:

Itzo steige ich schon in meinem Gehirne die Leiter meines Verstandes hinauf / die Anklage meiner unbarmhertigen Princessin mit einem wolpolierten Spiesse der Wolredenheit zu widerlegen. Anitzo stehe ich auff der Catheder der Mauer / und schiesse die Pfeile der scharffen Beredsamkeit zu Thür und Fenster des Hertzens bey den Ohren meiner gnädigen Königin hinein / daß sie nichts anders sagen kan / als dictum factum.

[In my thoughts I am already climbing up the ladder of my mind in order to refute the accusation of my merciless princess with a well-polished spear of rhetoric. Now I am standing at the pulpit of the wall and am shooting the arrows of my sharp eloquence through the ears and into the door and window of the heart of my gracious queen so that she can say no more than "No sooner said than done."]

The normally sanguine Corylo even associates this parodistic style explicitly with the Pickelhering with his comment about a young student with similar stylistic

¹⁷² Weise, *Ancre*, 234.

¹⁷³ Johann Beer, *Die vollkommene Geschichte des Corylo* (1679), in *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Ferdinand van Ingen and Hans-Gert Roloff, 12 vols. (Bern: Peter Lang, 1986), 3: 42. That such loquacity is regarded by Weise as effeminate is another example of this misogynistic age.

¹⁷⁴ Kormart, *Timocates*, 110–11.

propensities¹⁷⁵: "mag der Narr etwan in eine Pickelherings-Comoedia gegangen seyn / darinnen er solche Schnacken einen gantzen Sack voll aufgeraffet" (the fool probably went to a Pickelhering play where he accumulated an entire satchel of such "bon mots").

The emphasis on scatological humor and sexual innuendo can also be seen as direct criticism of the hollow language employed by the court, as is noted succinctly by Hansen¹⁷⁶:

Die in Sexual- und Fäkalkomik getränkte Zote ist niemals ein Vorrecht des niederen Standes gewesen und hat selten um der Widerwärtigkeit willen die Lacher auf ihrer Seite gehabt. Die unverhohlen mit Harlekins Dreistigkeit sympathisierende Auflehnung gegen Extremverhalten, heiße es nun emphatische Gefühlsäußerung, blindwütige Tollkühnheit, selbstzerfleischende Unterwürfigkeit, Lobhudelei, neurotisches Liebesschmachten – mit einem Wort gegen die Verlogenheit von Sitte und Moral einer Gesellschaft, die solche Formen als Wohlverhalten postulierte, hat sich im Gelächter entkrampf.

[The dirty joke saturated with a sexual or scatological content has never been the exclusive property of the lower classes and rarely attracted the laughers because of its offensive nature. The rebellion which is clearly sympathetic to the Harlequin's insolence and which targets all forms of extreme behavior, whether in the form of the overly dramatic expression of feelings, raging bravado, self-flagellating subservience, sycophantic flattery, or neurotic yearning for love, is in reality directed at the false manners and morality of a society which considers such things to be good behavior, and all this finds its release in laughter.]

The satire is by means restricted to the so-called failings of the two social classes to which the author does not belong, but is also directed to a lesser extent at the other gender. It may be funny when clowns such as the opportunistic Allegro dress up as women, but male anxieties are definitely provoked when the gender hierarchy is inverted. In an effort to make them more compliant with male expectations, ambitious women in Weise's plays such as Substantia in *Bäurischer Machiavellus* or Duplicia in *Verkehrte Welt*, and particularly those who ignore class boundaries such as the pretentious Pasquella in *Masaniello*, are mocked, while the "shrewish" Catharina is even subjected to hunger "cures" and torture.¹⁷⁷ And Dorides too inveighs against women for in his mind they are overly concerned with social status and financial security¹⁷⁸: "Ehe man was wird / ist kein Rabenaß zu bewegen / denn die Nase stinckt ihnen allezeit hoch" (Until you make something of yourself, you cannot attract the attention of these beasts who think

¹⁷⁵ Beer, *Corylo* (1679), 71.

¹⁷⁶ Hansen, *Formen*, 12.

¹⁷⁷ Kremer, *Bauernsatire*, 112.

¹⁷⁸ Kormart, *Timocrates*, 20.

they are too good for you). He even attempts to cope with his anxieties about a powerful queen by demonizing and humiliating her, if only in his own mind¹⁷⁹: “wie sieht die Königin grausam erbärmlich Tyrannisch aus / wie ein Schaff” (the queen looks so cruel and pitifully tyrannical, just like a sheep).

Since both the authors and the audiences in Saxony were primarily Lutheran, some satire against Catholicism does manage to insinuate itself into the works. This is perhaps most obvious in the grotesque scene in which Allegro parodies the martyr plays by trying to sell a piece of Masaniello’s foot as a reliquary,¹⁸⁰ but may also be seen when Dorides pretends to be a priest holding mass in a pagan Love Chapel and even describes a priest, ironically enough, in disrespectful terms¹⁸¹: “Der Priester warttet dort wie ein Narre / und gaffet überal herum” (The priest is waiting there like a fool and gapes in all directions).

From the above, it should be clear that all works considered are satirical in nature and include such forms as parody and travesty. Both the comedies and farces, where the irrepressible Pickelhering acts as the principal satirical commentator, as well as the novels, which have been described as comedies in narrative form, seek to highlight human imperfections and foibles, including extreme or irrational behavior, immorality and the lack of education, patriotism and/or the expected religious/spiritual perspective. The main groups targeted by these middle-class male authors are the peasantry, the lower urban classes and the aristocracy, with some attention given to those adopting French fashions, to women and to Catholics.

While the witty, materialistic Pickelhering, who generally represents a form of gluttony, lechery and/or sloth, is the creator or carrier of much of the character as well as situational and linguistic humor in these works, the means of soliciting laughter may differ, depending on the author’s intentions. Weise tends to focus much more on slapstick and for the most part understandably eschews scatological expressions and sexual innuendo in his school plays, but there is more of the latter than one might expect; Printz likewise avoids bawdy in his novels, but will relate feculent jokes with enthusiasm, with the same being true for Beer and the comedy *Tugend- und Liebesstreit*. On the other hand, Kormart, Beer, Kuhnau and the anonymous comedies relish the play with sexual expressions which usually appear indirectly as euphemisms. In the use of music, dance, and singing the Pickelhering retains essential features of the original English Pickelhering, with the name increasingly being used to denote a generic clown.

This plethora of examples taken from the novels and plays written in the last twenty five years of the seventeenth century is centered around the Pickelhering

¹⁷⁹ Kormart, *Timocrates*, 30.

¹⁸⁰ Weise, *Masaniello*, 365.

¹⁸¹ Kormart, *Timocrates*, 192a (mispaginated as “192”).

as the personification, as it were, of comic humor in seventeenth-century Germany. These examples underscore the central significance of laughter in our lives and could be continued ad infinitum. Laughter tells a lot about human nature and about a particular culture at a particular point of time in history in terms of its values, attitudes, ideas, and emotions. Bawdy and scatological jokes, incidentally, should not be dismissed out-of-hand as tasteless because they often reveal the preoccupations, if not fears and anxiety, of a given age, thereby acting as a natural and healthy corrective to an overemphasis on moral, religious, social, and political strictures. In his 1905 book on joking, Freud, for example, addresses this very issue when he emphasizes strongly the need to release pent-up impulses created by social tensions and conflicts.¹⁸² Laughter is moreover not restricted to the audience on which the acting troupes depended for money or goodwill, but can also found in readers of all ages, including our own, who, perhaps unwittingly, reveal themselves more often than not by what and whom they laugh at.

Bergson has observed that man is an animal who laughs and who is laughed at,¹⁸³ and this certainly applies to the Pickelhering who is a vehicle for mockery, parody, satire, irony, sarcasm and even an occasional dose of sadism that aligns him more with the commedia dell'arte comic persona Brighella as well as the devil tradition. We laugh, as Bergson would have, at his rigid materiality, expressed by the repeated focus on the body and basic drives in comedies, as such a perspective reflects an unanticipated lack of awareness of the moral and spiritual values embraced by society. We laugh at his transgressions and failure to meet social and aesthetic norms, and, more specifically, we laugh at his irreverence, his vices, his practical jokes, his lack of self-awareness, his parodistic impersonations, his lack of education and etiquette, as well as his inability to think logically.

Yet we also laugh with him when he deflates, degrades and/or exposes the shortcomings of social types and individuals (although only rarely) who do not conform to social norms, such as peasants, uneducated people, guild members, Catholic priests and practices, members of the aristocracy, and women, although our laughter may well be tempered when we recognize our own frailties mirrored in the Pickelhering and his satire. He may also illuminate the inflexible, automatistic nature of restrictive social norms as well as the dark underbelly of political and religious practices, policies and power struggles, thus revealing his subversive potential as well as the moral stance of the author, a stance that incidentally is an essential ingredient in the superiority theory of laughter,¹⁸⁴

¹⁸² Paul Lewis, *Comic Effects: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Humor in Literature* (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 1989), 71.

¹⁸³ Bergson, *Le Rire*, 3.

¹⁸⁴ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (1651; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), 125.

according to which we laugh not only at the deficiencies of others, but also at our own, thus showing the ability to rise above them. We laugh at the Pickelhering, we laugh with him, while at all times admiring his Dionysian vitality, his wit, and his sanguine affirmation of life.

It is, however, ironic that this comic persona who apparently started out as a social type in London in the 1580s and who was transmuted into the stereotypical Englishman and a stage clown by English troupes touring the continent was to gradually become a German clown by the latter half of the seventeenth century and, as such, a symbol of German culture for some authors in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. After the return of touring companies from Italy, commencing around 1693, the Pickelhering and Jean Potage were replaced by the more refined Harlequin and, particularly in Austria, by a reimagined Hanswurst. Yet the Pickelhering continued to exist as a street performer until the nineteenth century and has never totally disappeared. Stage jigs from the 1620 collection entitled *Englische Comedien und Tragedien* were reprinted by Achim von Arnim in 1840 and Walter Meckauer in 1920, while amateur productions of Gryphius's *Peter Squentz* and the stage farce *Pickelhering in der Kiste* continue until today. In a TV-show from 1998 entitled ". . . und im Keller gärt es" (. . . And Things Are Brewing in the Basement) the role of the Pickelhering is resuscitated by the Berlin actor Gerd Vespermann (1926–2001), while in the same year our comic persona shows up as the narrator in Robert Bly's novel *The Late Mr. Shakespeare* (1998). This was followed in 2007 by the opera *Pickelhering 1607 or The New Orpheus of Bohemia*, with a libretto by Pavel Drabek, which was performed at Masaryk University in the Czech Republic. In addition, the Pickelhering lived on in various other guises: on Tarot cards, as the joker in card decks, as the original Kasperle and as the circus clown with white face. The reception of this fascinating figure and the reasons for his longevity will, however, have to await a future publication for a more detailed examination.

Chapter 27

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Andreae's *ludibrium*: Menippean Satire in the *Chymische Hochzeit*

Toward the end of Johann Valentin Andreae's celebrated narrative—the third and last of the original Rosicrucian texts of 1614–1616—Christian Rosencreutz tells of his initiation into an esoteric order. A castle page reads the five “Articles” to which members must agree. The last article—“That you shall not be willing to live longer than God will have you”—seems ludicrous to them. “[W]e could not choose but laugh sufficiently,” Christian explains, “and it may well have been placed after the rest, only for a conceit.”¹ This conceit or jest (German *Posse*)² suggests that the order is unlike any occult group promising elixirs of life and great longevity. It also recalls the first “Agreement” of the Rosicrucian order, “That none of them

¹ *The Hermetick Romance: Or the Chymical Wedding*, trans. E. Foxcroft (London: A. Sowle, 1690), 220. Unless supplemented by further information, references to this work will be placed in parentheses within the text. Quotations preserve the vagaries of seventeenth-century typesetting, including extensive use of italics.

² Johann Valentin Andreae, *Chymische Hochzeit Christiani Rosencreutz Anno 1459*, ed. Alfons Rosenberg (Munich: Barth, 1957), 158. A new edition of the German text is forthcoming in Johann Valentin Andreae, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 3, *Rosenkreutzer Schriften: Fama Fraternitatis R. C. (1614), Confessio Fraternitatis R. C. (1615), Chymische Hochzeit Christiani Rosencreutz (1616), Allgemeine und General Reformation der gantzen weiten Welt (1614)*, ed. and trans. Roland Edighoffer (Stuttgart-Bad Canstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 2009). Edighoffer's approach is anticipated in his essay “Hermeticism in Early Rosicrucianism,” *Gnosis and Hermeticism: From Antiquity to Modern Times*, ed. Roelof van den Broek and Wouter J. Hanegraaff (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1998), 297–316.

should profess any other thing, then to cure the sick, and that *gratis*.”³ The nine new “Knights of the Golden Stone” are then given power over sickness, recalling the power that Jesus gave to the twelve disciples.⁴ They are also given power over poverty and ignorance.

With these new powers, Andreae’s first-person narrator signs the register of members:

Summa scientia nihil scire / Fr. CHRISTIANUS ROSENCREUTZ /
Eques aurei Lapidis / Anno 1459 (221)

[The height of knowledge is to know nothing / Brother Christian
Rosencreutz / Knight of the Golden Stone / 1459]

Brother Christian has chosen as his personal motto a comment on the Socratic “I know nothing” and one that editors have likened to the “learned ignorance” of Nicolas Cusanus.⁵ (It also recalls a line of Sophocles quoted in the *Moriae Encomium* of Erasmus and translated by Robert Burton in *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, “’t is the pleasantest life to know nothing.”⁶) Throughout the previous six days of his story, Christian has lamented his *Unverstand* or lack of understanding—a lack that has added to his sense of *Unwürdigkeit* or unworthiness. This *Unverstand* and *Unwürdigkeit* both seem odd, for he is the only guest who understands what happens during the strange “chemical wedding” and who is unquestionably worthy to be there. However, his understanding and worthiness are revealed only gradually over the course of his story, both to himself and to his readers. With the new motto, he asserts the value of open-mindedness and establishes himself as a sort of wise fool. Another editor has recalled a paradox of St. Paul: “God hath chosen the foolish things of this world to confound the wise.”⁷

When he joins the laughter over the last rule, Christian is happily laughing for the first time in a week during which he has been a frequent target of laughter. Some

³ *The Fame and Confession of the Fraternity of R: C*: (London: Giles Calvert, 1651), 14. For background on the English translation see Thomas Willard, “The Rosicrucian Manifestos in Britain,” *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 77.4 (1983): 489–95.

⁴ *Hermetick Romance*, 219, 220; Matt. 10:1.

⁵ See, for example, Bernard Gorceix, trans. and ed., *La Bible de Rose-Croix* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1970), 123, n. 2.

⁶ Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (Oxford: Cripps, 1624), 295; 2.3.8 (“Against Melancholy Itself”): “As Ajax in Sophocles, *Nihil scire vita iudundissima*, ’t is the pleasantest life to know nothing.” Erasmus quotes the Greek original in *Moriae Encomium*. See *The Praise of Folly*, trans. and ed. Robert M. Adams (New York: Norton, 1989), 13 and n. 9.

⁷ 1 Cor. 1: 27; John Warwick Montgomery, *Cross and Crucible: Johann Valentin Andreae (1586–1654) Phoenix of the Theologians*, 2 vols., continuously paginated, International Archives of the History of Ideas 55 (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1973), 481, n. 5. Vol. 2 of this work reproduces the English translation of 1690 in facsimile with notes on facing pages.

readers find the earlier laughter unsettling, even indecorous in a story of Christian initiation. I think, however, that it helps to advance the narrative and to draw readers into the protagonist's pilgrimage. It also helps to place the narrative within the form of satire that Andreae identified with the ancient writer Menippus. By following the episodes of laughter and showing how they are appropriate to what is known as Menippean satire, I hope to clarify what Andreae meant when he called his most famous work a *ludibrium*.

This last word will require some explanation, for it has a wide range of possible meanings. Derived from the Latin verb *ludere* ("to play"), it indicates first of all that Andreae saw the *Hochzeit* as a kind of game, and indeed the text is full of puzzles. But before we can determine how he meant it to be construed, we must learn something about the text itself and its relation to the Rosicrucian phenomenon.

Printed in 1616, *Chymische Hochzeit Christiani Rosencreutz Anno 1549* (literally "The Chemical Wedding of Christian Rosy Cross in the Year 1549") is commonly considered the last of the original Rosicrucian writings. It followed manifestos published in 1614 and 1615, presenting the brotherhood's story (*Fama Fraternitatis*) and creed (*Confessio Fraternitatis*). The three volumes created a media blitz that accounted for hundreds of items, first in Germany and then throughout the Protestant states.⁸ Because the brothers gave no address, the main means of getting their attention was to write a pamphlet and dedicate it to them. Andreae was clearly embarrassed to be associated with the hundreds of entreaties, mostly from quirky zealots. Although he acknowledged authorship of the *Hochzeit* in his posthumously published memoirs, he considered it part of his juvenilia.

The *Hochzeit* is often called the third manifesto, but that is a misnomer. Running to more than thirty thousand words, it is three times as long as both of the other tracts put together and far more literary. Much of its message is latent rather than manifest, concealed in allegory and by tropes of metaphor and irony. Although the Christian Rosencreutz of the *Hochzeit* is clearly meant to be the "Brother C. R." of the *Fama*, there are many subtle differences. The *Hochzeit* purports to be "the chemical wedding of Christian Rosencreutz" in the sense of being his eyewitness account of a miraculous event, written in his own words, and it only becomes an account of his wedding as he is metaphorically identified with the event. The

⁸ See Carlos Gilly, *Cimelia Rhodostaurotica: Die Rosenkreuzer im Spiegel der zwischen 1610 und 1660 entstandenen Handschriften und Drucke* (Amsterdam: In der Pelikaan, 1995), which catalogues 350 items. Also see Elizabeth Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change*. 2 vols. continuously paginated (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 274–76.

Fama, meanwhile, tells about C. R. in the third person and treats his story as heroic myth. It tells how a German of noble birth came to spend his youth in the Middle East; how he brought the wisdom of Arabia to the authorities of Europe, who found it "a laughing matter"; and how he subsequently founded a society of his own.⁹ The *Hochzeit*'s narrator describes himself as "a Brother of the Red Rosie-Cross" with a number of "thankful Schollars," but lives in a simple "Cottage" or "Cell" (18, 27, 76). Meanwhile, C. R. erects a grand meeting house, "called *Sancti spiritus*" and visible only to the elect.¹⁰ Of course, one could say that Rosencreutz is not a Rosicrucian himself, in the way that Freud was not a Freudian or Christ a Christian. However, Andreae's account of the elderly Christian may well correct impressions left by the glowing treatment of his mythical youth.

Despite the apparent contradictions, the three texts are linked by a series of astronomically significant dates, all of which suggest a back story to which readers are not fully introduced. The *Fama* presents itself as "A Discovery of the Fraternity of the most laudable Order of the Rosy Cross," a text prepared after the tomb of C. R. had mysteriously opened, revealing his perfectly preserved corpse and the manuscripts he had written. The *Confessio* links the event to the appearance of Kepler's Supernova—"new Stars, which do appear and are seen in the Firmament in *Serpentario* and *Cygnus*"—which is to say, the year 1604.¹¹ An inscription on the tomb's door said it was sealed 120 years earlier, indicating that C. R. died in 1484, and a further note states that he was born in 1378.¹² The dates of his birth and death were important ones for astrologers: what would later be known as Haley's Comet appeared in the skies over Europe 1378, and there was a conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter in 1484. As we shall see, the year of the chemical wedding, 1459, had similar significance.¹³

Andreae said he wrote the *Hochzeit* in 1605, the year after the presumed opening of Christian Rosencreutz's tomb.¹⁴ Since he was nineteen that year, and still a

⁹ *Fame and Confession*, 8.

¹⁰ *Fame and Confession*, 13.

¹¹ *Fame and Confession*, 1, 47. Kepler's supernova appeared in the constellations of the Swan and Serpent, in the Milky Way. For his book on the subject see Gilly, *Cimelia Rhodostaurótica* 23–24 and illustrations 22, 22a. Another "new star," Tycho's supernova, had appeared in the constellation of Casiopeia in 1572.

¹² *Fame and Confession*, 20, 43.

¹³ For further information see Roland Edighoffer's note on "Astrology in Andreae's Work" in Johann Valentin Andreae, *Nachrufe, Autobiographische Schriften, Cosmoxenus*, ed. Frank Böhling et al. (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1995), 356–63.

¹⁴ Andreae's handwritten *Breviarium Vitae* dates his "Nuptia Chymica" (i.e., *Chymische Hochzeit*) to 1605, the year following the presumptive composition of the *Fama*. His longer *Vitae Concredita* (handwritten in 1643) discusses the work's reception. Andreae does not acknowledge authorship of the anonymous *Fama* and *Confessio* in the manuscript biography; however, some say that he

student in the theology faculty at Tübingen, it seems only natural that he was inspired by older millenarians and that he revised the *Hochzeit* before its publication eleven years later. His holograph memoir makes it clear that the three texts emerged from a circle of friends in Tübingen.¹⁵ It also shows that he was embarrassed by the furor these texts created. Quite conceivably, his revisions of the *Hochzeit* may have tried to clarify what he considered the serious message behind a strictly mythical story.

* * *

As a literary text, the *Hochzeit* is divided into seven sections—numbered *Dies 1*. ("The First Day"), *Dies 2*. ("The Second day"), and so forth. The sections seem to be arranged in a circular pattern with a journey out on days two and three, a turning point on day four, and a return home at the end of day seven.¹⁶ The story begins "ON an Evening before *Easter-Day*." As the old hermit meditates on the "*Paschal Lamb*" and the "unleavened" bread, he is visited by a beautiful winged lady carrying "a *Trumpet* of beaten Gold" and "a great bundle of *Letters* of all *Languages*." She is probably meant to represent both Virgil's *Fama* and the Rosicrucian *Fama*.¹⁷ She delivers an invitation to a "*Royal Wedding*" along with directions and a warning: "*Let him beware, too light that weighs*," which is to say, the unworthy should stay home (6).

On the second day, Christian travels to the royal castle, which he recognizes by the sight of three temples on a hill, most likely an allusion to the Mount of Transfiguration.¹⁸ Once there, he is greeted by a porter or gatekeeper (*Hütter*), who calls him brother and presents a token with mottos to guide him. There are many other guests, perhaps as many as twelve dozen, and they are warned that their worthiness will be put to the test. All but nine of them are found lacking on the third day, and are dispatched with sentences of increasing severity. Christian and eight other guests receive the garment of a preliminary Order of the Golden Fleece. On the fourth day, they are brought into the presence of the royal family. They

hints at it. See Carlos Gilly, *Cimelia Rhodostaurotica*, 49, and illustrations 290–91.

¹⁵ Recent scholarship confirms the older view that Andreae had a hand in all three, but worked within a circle of friends who shared millenarian interests; see Gilly, *Rhodostaurotica*, 43–67. For present purposes, it does not matter whether he wrote all three Rosicrucian texts or only one.

¹⁶ For an excellent discussion of the tradition of circular stories in Biblical, classical, and folk traditions see Mary Douglas, *Thinking in Circles: An Essay on Ring Composition*. Terry Lecture Series (New Haven, NJ: Yale University Press, 2007).

¹⁷ *Hermetick Romance*, 3–4. See Virgil, *Aeneid* 3.121ff. and *Fame and Confession*, 41: "the *Fama* [has] be[en] set forth in five languages, and is manifested to every one."

¹⁸ *Hermetic Romance*, 6; Mark 9: 2–8.

attend a play in seven acts with symbolic interludes, after which they watch in horror as the royals are ritually beheaded. Later that night, as others sleep, Christian sees caskets containing the slain bodies and boxes containing the severed heads as they are loaded onto sailing ships.

On the fifth day, the guests set sail for an island with a seven-storey "Tower of Olympus," symbolizing the traditional seven stages of the alchemical work (139). There on the sixth day, Christian and three other guests perform the chemical wedding of matter and spirit, producing miniature humans or homunculi. By the time the guests return to the palace, on the seventh day, the homunculi have grown into the king and queen everyone knew—the same pair but different. Of all the guests, only Christian understands how this regeneration has taken place. For he has witnessed several things: the moving of the corpses on the fourth night, a celestial event on the fifth night, and the alchemical work itself. Along with the king, he feigns ignorance, "as if it seemed strange to us too" (211), but he now has to admit that he holds a position of honor greater than any other guest (212). The king leads the evening's entertainment, which ends with the initiation into the higher esoteric order.

At the end of each day, Christian has a dream or vision. The first three dreams, following the events of the first three days, are cautionary. In the first, the dreamer suffers a head wound as he tries to hoist himself out of a pit, a signal that intellectual curiosity can get him in trouble. In the second, he sees men fly up in the air but crash to the ground—a warning that the higher one rises the harder one can fall. In the third, he pauses at a door and struggles with the handle, and this after a day when the king has told him to stop exploring parts of the castle. After days four and five, Christian stays up late and reports visions—first of coffins laded onto ships, then of celestial events. Both prepare him to participate in the creation of the homunculi, which require the union of earthly and heavenly forces. After day six, he enjoys a "sweep Sleep, for," he says, "I continued in one Dream from eleven of the Clock till eight in the morning" (208).

The pattern of action followed by dream or vision breaks off in the seventh section, when the text itself comes to an abrupt ending. When the evening's entertainment is over, and Christian has gone to bed, there is a note that "*Here are wanting about two Leaves in quarto*" (226). The two quarto leaves are presumably the last two leaves of a quire or gathering, torn away from the others. Andreae implies that he once read the missing words, but could not find a complete manuscript for the press. He thus distances himself as the manuscript's editor from Christian Rosencreutz as the presumptive author. The first German and English editions included marginal notes throughout, many of them in Latin or sprinkled with Latin words. After these marginalia, the postscript seems a simple extension or a final comment, and so lets Andreae test the reader's credulousness.

When he sent the manuscript to his regular publisher, Lazarus Zetzner in Strasbourg, Andreae must have presented it as a text he had merely edited. For Zetzner gave it to his engraver to review before publication. The engraver, Johann Friedrich Jung, aspired to be a Rosicrucian himself and had just written a long epistle to the brethren. After reading the manuscript, he appended a postscript:

As I ended this letter, a small German book was submitted for my examination with the title *The Chemical Wedding of Christian Rosencreutz*, 1459, and undoubtedly written by the founders and first brethren of your Order. Here the whole alchemical Art was described in riddling form (enigmatically), which so pleased me that I told to my employer the book was quite worthy to be published, even though it was not without moments of envy and scoffing.¹⁹

The word translated as “envy” (German *Neid*) refers to the secrecy of occultists, and specifically to Christian's refusal to say exactly what he learned in the castle library and crypt before the king told him to leave. The word translated as “scoffing” (*Spott*) is the one Andreae regularly used as the German equivalent of *ludibrium*.²⁰

Until he joins his fellow guests in laughing about the last rule of their new order, Christian is quite mirthless. He laughs only twice and with no obvious relish: he joins the polite laughter at a riddle told over dinner on the third day (85), and laughs the next morning when the “Virgin” (*Jungfrau*) presiding over the wedding ceremony jokes about his decrepitude (106). Only when the guests laugh about the rule of their new order is the laughter benign: the laughter of understanding that their order is entirely subject to the will of God. Many of the original guests come with the hope of gaining knowledge and power that God never gave to humans, or took away in ancient times. The point is that a true order of Christian mystics does not force the hand of God.

Most of the earlier laughter is directed at Christian. It first comes in a dream that he has before setting off on his journey. In the dream, an “Ancient Matron” laughs to see him hobbled by shackles that were placed on him (perhaps symbolic of his eagerness to know) and tells him to rejoice that he has “come into so high a light” in the present world (16–17). It continues after he arrives at the castle and two

¹⁹ Quoted in Gilly, *Cimelia Rhodostaurótica*, 82–83.

²⁰ The word had a wider range of meaning in the sixteenth century than it does now. The Grimms' *Deutsche Wörterbuch* gives *ludibrium* as the first Latin equivalent, followed by *irrisio* and *cavillatio*. See *Das Deutsche Wörterbuch von Jacob und Wilhelm Grimm*, “Spott”: <http://germazope.uni-trier.de/Projects/DWB> (last accessed on Jan. 30, 2010). Andreae's modern translators also use *Scherz*. See J. V. Andreae, *Cosmopolis*, trans. Wolfgang Biesterfeld (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1975), 11.

pages laugh at him “for being so terrified” by the warnings read to the guests (32). Before the guests are tested on the third day, the virgin laughs at him for having assumed himself unworthy to be tested (46). Later, after he has tested the weightiest of all, his attending page laughs at him for being confused about a mechanical marvel in the castle garden (79). He is so clever that he expects to understand how everything works. Later, when his curiosity leads him to the tomb of the earthly Venus, on the fifth day, her son Cupid laughs at him twice. Cupid laughs first to see Christian’s shock at being caught, and again to see the blood that his arrow has drawn from Christian’s hand, the hand that uncovered his mother’s nakedness (131–32). Even as Christian is about to perform the great work of alchemy on day six, the virgin laughs at him for thinking that he will be excluded, and the keeper of the alchemical tower laughs as well (197–98).²¹ Although Christian knows how the work is to be performed, and knows that the other guests do not, he falls victim to the virgin’s prank and thinks once more that he is unworthy. Indeed, he is most comfortable in the role of the unworthy and unknowing person, and is only too glad to follow the virgin’s instructions and behave as though his fate at the tower had truly been “Lamentable” (206). Back at the castle on day seven, he and the king pretend, as we have seen, to know nothing more than anyone else about what happened at the tower.

The laughter at Christian is well intended for the most part. The castle officials realize that he is worthier of honor than he knows—at least than he wants to admit. The king’s chief advisor, who is named Atlas, remarks that Christian has “undervalued” (*außgeschätzt*) his position in the world (79). A high ranking woman, mistaken at first as the bride and called “the Dutches” in a marginal note, recognizes his worth and tells him, “*thou . . . hast received more than others, see that thou also make a larger return*” (93). As the narrator of his own tale, he asks readers “not to interpret the following Narration to any vain glory or pride of my own” and adds that he would have concealed his honors “if there had not been a special necessity in it” (212). The laughing officials help to confirm his worthiness, and let him know that all will be revealed in good order. If he has a besetting sin, it is impatience. He is too eager to penetrate the castle’s secrets, and lets his page lead him where he should not yet go: to the library and crypt on day three and to the tomb of Venus on day five. Even the secrets of Venus are to be revealed, when Cupid appears at the Tower of Olympus and awakens the new king and queen.²²

²¹ *Hermetick Wedding*, 197–98. The “old man” is unnamed but seems to embody the Prince Hermes of the inscription revealed on day four. He and Cupid, who arrives at the tower in time for the alchemical wedding, represent the powers of Mercury and Venus whose conjunction overhead is required for the work to occur.

²² *Hermetick Romance*, 205. Before Cupid appears, Christian reflects that the Venus he saw underground must have been made by the same process as the homunculi (201).

Some of the laughter at Christian is malicious, however, and it comes from his fellow guests. When the virgin pretends to exclude him and three others from the final work, some laugh cruelly. Although a few later "sympathized" with those who did remain to make gold, he realizes that "others were glad of this our misfortune" (197, 207). Of course, the reader's laughter is directed at the gold-makers, who never learn about the higher alchemy. Any laughter at the other guests is qualitatively different from that at Christian.

Although nine guests remain after the third day, Christian is clearly *primus inter pares*. He is the only one who was fully equal to the literal weighing of character. (Seven others reached the level just below him, and he was allowed to select an eighth guest from among those who chose not to be weighed.) On the literal level, the extra guests round out the party and enliven the table conversation, but on the figurative or moral level they fade away, leaving Christian as the focus of the wedding.

The harshest laughter in the *Hochzeit*, accounting for nearly a quarter of all the laughs, comes from the least worthy guests or is directed at them. (There are one hundred nineteen of limited moral *gravitas* and many more with none at all.) As the laughter moves away from Christian and the mysterious wedding, the story becomes more broadly satirical. In what is almost a rule of satire, the characters who have the strongest sense of their own self-importance are the most vulnerable to criticism. Only a few are acquaintances of Christian—he is a hermit, after all—and they seem surprised to see him. When he says he has come with God's help, they laugh, finding it "ridiculous that there should be need of *God* in so slight an occasion" (33). Christian does not laugh back, but his descriptions of the conversation in which "the most sorry *Idiots* made the loudest noise" make his contempt clear enough:

Ah, when I call to mind what *preternatural* and impossible enterprises I then heard, I am still ready to vomit at it. . . . In brief, every man had his own Prate, and yet the great *Lords* were so simple that they believed their pretences, and the Rogues so audacious that although one of other of them was here or there rapped over the Fingers with a Knife, yet they flinched not at it . . . I saw one who heard the rustling of the Heavens. The second could see *Plato's* Ideas. A third could number *Democritus's* Atoms. There were also not a few pretenders to the *perpetual motion*. Many an one (in my opinion) had good *understanding*, but assumed too to[o] much to himself, to his own destruction. (34–36)

Christian clearly thinks that none of these will survive to witness the wedding.

When the guests are put to the test on the following day, the "most sorry *Idiots*" fail miserably, and their failure is greeted by hoots of laughter from all the king's soldiers (50–51). The laughter is well deserved. One tries to weigh himself down by concealing a copy of his book under his scholar's gown. When the quacks who

sell medical panaceas are tested, Christian can barely restrain himself. He is ready, he says, "to burst my Belly with laughing," but manages somehow to maintain decorum (52). The king issues a declaration to those rejected after the test. It shows pity for those who have been "seduced by base Rascals" and their "seductive Writings" and dismisses them without further penalty, but dictates harsher measures for the authors of those books and other cheats (68). The servants are forbidden to jeer at the hapless non-survivors, but a few cannot refrain.

With the exposure of the unworthy wedding guests we come to the heart of Andreae's *ludibrium*.

When Andreae acknowledged authorship of the *Hochzeit*, he claimed that it had been badly misunderstood—"evaluated and interpreted with subtle ingenuity by some people, foolishly enough, in demonstration of the inanity of the curious."²³ He was frankly embarrassed by the success of his story, and referred to it as a *ludibrium*. This seems to be the "transferred" sense of the word Lewis and Short give as "jest" or "sport."²⁴ However, some readers have give it more positive and negative constructions, ranging from "fantasy" and "pleasantry" to "mockery."²⁵ A scholarly exchange from three decades back will help to identify the issues at stake.

In 1972, the historian Frances Yates discussed Andreae's interest in comedy, noting that he studied Latin drama and engaged in student productions. In her typically daring study *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment*, she applied the word *ludibrium* to the Rosicrucian story generally. Not only did she call the *Hochzeit* a "comic fiction"; she suggested that the story there and in the *Fama* "might have been [offered as] a divine comedy, or some allegorical presentation of a complex religious and philosophical movement having a direct bearing on the times."²⁶ Continuing the argument, she found Rosicrucian ties throughout the Scientific Revolution and suggested that the intellectual temperament behind the New Learning could be

²³ Cited in Montgomery 1: 37, n. 66. See material quoted in Frank Edward Manuel and Fritzie Prigohzi Manuel, *Utopian Thought in the Western World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), 836, n. 4, and for further context see 289–308.

²⁴ Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short, *A Latin Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1879), "ludibrium" II. Cf. *Oxford English Dictionary*, "ludibrious" *a*.

²⁵ A. E. Waite, *The Brotherhood of the Rosy Cross* (London: Rider, 1924), 187, and Roland Edighoffer, *Les Rose-Croix* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1982), 47; Paul Arnold, *Histoire des Rose-Croix et les origines des franc-maçonnerie* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1990).

²⁶ Frances A. Yates, *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment* (London: Routledge, 1972), 50–51, 81, and see 182.

termed Rosicrucian. Some historians praised her efforts, including her friend Hugh Trevor-Roper,²⁷ while others scorned it.

In 1979, the literary historian Brian Vickers wrote a scathing essay on Yates's historiography. He characterized *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment* as fanciful in the extreme and took as his leading example of Yates's wishful thinking her positive construction of the word *ludibrium*. "²⁸ All of Andreae's uses of the word seem to me pejorative," he said. Andreae, after all, had denounced the excesses of the response to the Rosicrucian message with "a serious Christian's sense of outrage." In order to place him within an intellectual movement, Yates was obliged "to "distort Andreae's actual relation to this 'furore'." "²⁹ Her treatment of *ludibrium* as "comedy" required a "specious misuse of linguistic context." It leads to the impression that Andreae never changed his mind about Rosicrucianism, making her hero into "a kind of double agent."³⁰ In some ways, he suggested, she was no more historical than the esoteric societies that claim Andreae as a Grand Master.³¹ In retrospect, there is truth on both sides. Vickers is right to observe that the primary meaning of *ludibrium* in Roman antiquity was "mockery" and that the transferred meaning could also be "laughing-stock."³² However, that was not the only meaning. Even Tacitus, who routinely used *ludibrium* as a synonym for *contumelia* ("contempt") when identifying the vices that must be purged from a just society,³³ also used the word for the public entertainments that Nero perversely offered when he devised gruesome deaths for Christians.³⁴ Meanwhile, Yates is right to note that the word *ludibrium* is used in Roman comedy. In the comedies of Terrence, however, the characters are held *in ludibrio* when their vices are exposed and are brought into a happy ending only when the vices are renounced.³⁵

The *ludibrium* is not the comedy itself so much as the comeuppance that leads to its happy ending. It is part of the comedy nonetheless. Yates's point seems to be that Andreae saw virtues in the Rosicrucian myth as well as vices in its misconstruction. Her grand narrative of the "Rosicrucian Enlightenment" is overstated in some respects. Most scholars would now say that she claims too

²⁷ Marjorie G. Jones, *Frances Yates and the Hermetic Tradition* (Lake Worth, FL: Ibis, 2008), 146–47.

²⁸ Brian Vickers, "Frances Yates and the Writing of History," *Journal of Modern History* 51.2 (1979): 287–316, esp. 291–96.

²⁹ Vickers, "Frances Yates," 292, 293.

³⁰ Vickers, "Frances Yates," 295, 296.

³¹ See Serge Hutin, *Histoire des Rose-Croix* (Paris: Courrier du Livre, 1971), 38.

³² Vickers, "Frances Yates," 293; see Lewis and Short, *Latin Dictionary*, "ludibrium" I, IIA.

³³ See Paul Plass, *Wit and the Writing of History: Political Rhetoric in Imperial Rome*. Wisconsin Studies in Classics (University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), 15–25.

³⁴ Tacitus, *Annales*, 15.44.

³⁵ See, e.g., Terence, *Hecyra*, line 148; in Terence, ed. and trans. John Sergeant (London: Heinemann/Loeb, 1912), 2: 138–39.

much for some figures and overlooks others, and might agree with Vickers that she pushes some claims too far.³⁶ However, the narrative seems far more nuanced than Vickers suggests.

The laughter in the *Hochzeit* belongs to both comedy and satire. The laughter at Christian is largely comic, calculated to make him a little more human but serving to show his merits despite his great humility. The laughter at the other wedding guests is satiric, on the other hand, pointing up vices to be excluded from the wedding. A few commentators have called the *Hochzeit* comic. Bernard Gorceix, for example, has used the term *comédie burlesque*.³⁷ I know of no one who has called it a satire. However, Andreae's German word for *ludibrium* is *Spott*—a word used in the compound noun *Spottdichten* ("satire"). Moreover, Andreae wrote a book of "satiric dialogues"—one hundred in all—as a "mirror of the inanities" of his time. He published them under the title *Menippus*. In the dialogue entitled "Education for those Curious about Magic," a pious scientist who is reputed to be a magician tells a curious youth the secret of his art: "hard work and perseverance."³⁸

The title identified his satires as being in the manner of Menippus, a philosopher of the Cynic school whose work has not survived.³⁹ Menippus was known in antiquity as the earnest jester (*σπουδογέλοιος*) because his satires lampooned ideas of rival schools.⁴⁰ (He thus followed the advice of Gorgias, as reported by Aristotle: "kill your opponents' earnestness with jesting and their jesting with earnestness"⁴¹). His great disciple was Lucian, a wandering rhetorician who claimed to have lectured in Athens to great acclaim.⁴² Menippus was said to have combined

³⁶ See, e.g., See Nicholas Goodrich-Clarke, "The Rosicrucian Prelude," *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment Revisited*, ed. Ralph White (Hudson, NY: Lindisfarne, 1999), 73–97. I suspect that the hypothesis of a Rosicrucian Enlightenment is an attempt to restate the case for Hermeticism made in Yates's most famous book, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (London: Routledge, 1964).

³⁷ Bernard Gorceix, ed. and trans., *La Bible de Rose-Croix* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1970), xv.

³⁸ Tobias Churton translates this "playlet" with commentary in *The Invisible History of the Rosicrucians* (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2009), 320–23. Published after my essay was complete, this book includes two chapters on Andreae and much further information on his milieu. Carlos Gilly's edition of *Menippus sive dialogorum satyricorum* will appear as volume 9 of Andreae's collected works; see note 2 above.

³⁹ On the rediscovery of Menippus and the Menippean form in early modern Europe see Howard D. Weinbrot, *Menippus: From Antiquity to the Eighteenth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), especially 23–111.

⁴⁰ Gilbert Highet, *The Anatomy of Satire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), 35–37 and nn. 22–23 on 250–51.

⁴¹ Aristotle, *Rhetoric and Poetics*, trans. Friedrich Solmsen (New York: Modern Library, 1954), 216; 1419b.

⁴² Christopher Robinson, *Lucian and His Influence in Europe* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979), 3. Robinson cites internal evidence suggesting that the claim was greatly

verse and prose, and Lucian drew equally on the poetic comedies of Aristophanes and the prose dialogues of Plato to create incredible tales of conversations with gods and dead philosophers. In the most famous of those dialogues, Menippus is the main speaker, the Socrates to Lucian's Plato. In the *Icaromenippus*, for example, the main speaker tells his skeptical interlocutor that he has just returned from Mount Olympus, where he flew on wings of his own fashioning so that he could ask Zeus about matters that puzzled him. The dialogue combines the flight to Olympus from Aristophanes' *Peace* and serious questions about the gods from Plato's *Timaeus* and other dialogues. It thus has elements of comedy and satire as well as verse and prose—a hybrid form that came to be known as Menippean satire.

Erasmus translated the dialogues of Lucian into Latin, and Andreae studied them carefully. Andreae also studied the dialogues of Erasmus and especially liked the *Julius Exclusus*, a dialogue between Saint Peter and Julius II in which the newly deceased pope is outraged that he may not enter heaven. The dialogues in Andreae's *Menippus* have speakers who reveal their personal sins, as Julius does, or pronounce judgment on other people's vices. There is even a dialogue on brotherhood that touches on the Rosicrucians and their *ludibrium*. The book was published by the firm that published the *Hochzeit* and in the same year. It was followed three years later by a set of two dozen dialogues on the Rosicrucian "chaos." In the final dialogue, Fama herself spoke and asserted that there had been enough *ludibrium*. "The comedy is over," she continued. "Rumor [*Fama*] has presented herself and has removed herself again."⁴³

By Andreae's time Menippean satire extended the dialogue form. Erasmus's famous monologue *Moriae Encomium* ("The Praise of Folly") is considered Menippean, though the interlocutor is merely implied. Rabelais's fiction is also considered Menippean, with the dialogue being that of writer and reader. Further examples include More's *Utopia*, Voltaire's *Candide*, Alice books of Lewis Carroll, and recent novels as Eco's *Pendolo di Foucault*.⁴⁴ Though it fell into disuse after the Neo-Classical period, the term was revived independently by two leading critics of the last century. Northrop Frye connected it to the anatomy form, as illustrated

exaggerated.

⁴³ Johann Valentin Andreae, *Turris Babel Sive Judicorum de Fraternitate Rosae Crucis Chaos* (Strasbourg: Zetzner, 1619); the passage is translated in Gilly, *Cimelia Rhodostaurotica*, 79. A German translation of the full text will appear in Andreae's collected works; see note 2 above.

⁴⁴ Umberto Eco, *Foucault's Pendulum*, trans. William Weaver (1988; New York: Harcourt, 1989). Eco satirizes the whole of occult literature in this brilliant novel, and refers repeatedly to the Rosicrucian *ludibrium* as seen through the work of Yates. See, e.g., page 189.

by Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*,⁴⁵ while Mikhail Bakhtin associated it with the hybrid styles of ancient novels like *The Golden Ass*.⁴⁶

Another Menippean satire of Andreae's time was Boccalini's *Ragualli di Parnasso* ("Reports from Parnassus"). One chapter reported a conversation between Apollo and the seven sages of Greece about what could be done to improve the lot of mankind. Each sage spoke in turn, and the group was followed by the major thinkers of Italy. All their proposals proved worthless, however, and Apollo concluded that the best he could do was to reduce the price of food. A German translation of this report, probably by Andreae's friend Christoph Besold, was prefixed to the *Fama Fraternitatis* when the tract was first printed. It should have suggested how the first manifesto was to be interpreted: as a strictly utopian proposal for reformation of the church and state, impractical in the extreme given the world as it was. It seemed a sure sign of folly that most people stopped at the title page and took the *Fama* to propose a "General reformation of the whole wide world."⁴⁷ Had they read the translated passage, they would have noticed Apollo's pronouncement: "that the height of human wisdom lay in being so discreet, as to be content to leave the world as they found it."⁴⁸

For all their talk about secret books with secret knowledge, the Rosicrucian manifestos promote nothing so much as Protestant Christianity. The second manifesto says near its conclusion:

those are like unto us, and are very near allyed unto us, who do make the holy *Bible* a Rule of their life, and an end of all their studies; yea to let it be a *Compendium* and content of the whole World: And not only to have it continually in the mouth, but to know how to apply and direct the true understanding of it to all times and Ages of the World."⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), 309–12. Frye places Menippean satire between morality and fantasy, and we can see both poles in the *Hochzeit*: morality in the weighing of virtues and vices, fantasy in the wedding itself.

⁴⁶ M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, ed. Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 26.

⁴⁷ *Allgemeine und General Reformation der ganzen weiten Welt* (Cassel: Wesel, 1614). The same printer issued the same text from Boccalini (*Raggualio*, 177) as a separate pamphlet, also dated 1614; see Gilly, *Cimelia Rhodostaurótica*, 68–69 and illustrations 71–73.

⁴⁸ The seventeenth-century translation by the Earl of Monmouth is reprinted in Benedict J. Williamson, ed., *The Rosicrucian Manifestos* (Alexandria, VA: Invisible College Press, 2002), 97.

⁴⁹ *Fame and Confession*, 49. Dan Brown's latest thriller, *The Lost Symbol* (New York: Doubleday, 2009), ends on a similar note when the highest ranking Mason in the United States tells the protagonist, "The Ancient Mysteries and the Bible are the same thing" (481).

The clear implication is that people seeking enlightenment should study the Scriptures rather than hunt for esoteric masters. The preface to the manifestos does not endorse the view that they represent "a Philosophical shew, and no true History."⁵⁰ They suggest that there is more to the story, hidden in the recesses, but that has more to do with Reformation theology.⁵¹

Andreae never lost the utopian impulse. By the time that the Rosicrucian manifestos had been published, he had joined the Societas Christiana, a Christian community conceived by the Lutheran theologian Johann Arndt. In an open invitation printed in 1617, Andreae described the society as an alternative to the Rosicrucian *ludibrium*, calling it "contrary to that Rosicrucian *ludibrium*." (*ludibrio illi Rosencruciano opposita*).⁵² The Rosicrucian story was a *ludibrium* inasmuch as it encouraged people to seek out brethren who did not exist in the real world, but only on paper. The Christian Society was a group that actually met in Tübingen. Andreae's handwritten list of members includes several names from the circle of friends that produced the Rosicrucian manifestos.⁵³

He remained a dreamer himself, and his last major book, *Christianopolis*, described a kind of Protestant monastery, dedicated to the service of mankind and God. All were invited, but a vigilant gatekeeper turned away all imposters. Those imposters include those who, like the "sorry *Idiots*" in the *Hochzeit*, pretend to have mastered perpetual motion and gold-making. They also include Rosicrucians. For if the whole movement was a *ludibrium*, anyone claiming to be a Rosicrucian is by definition a pretender.

When the *Hochzeit* is read as a Menippean satire, it describes a transcendence that can only be attained by those who have unlearned the wisdom of the world. Just as the character Menippus finds he knows better than the dead philosophers in Lucian's *Hermotimus* ("Philosophies for Sale"), Christian learns that his *Unverstand* is worth more than all the *Verstand* that the worldly guests bring to the sacred wedding. His motto could be that of Menippus as well as Socrates: the height of knowledge is not to know. This unknowing places Christian squarely in the

⁵⁰ *Fame and Confession*, A6r–v.

⁵¹ On Luther and *ludibria*, see Heiko A. Oberman, *The Reformation: Roots and Ramifications*, trans. Andrew Colin Gow (New York: Continuum, 2004), 38 and n. 63.

⁵² "*ludibrio illi Rosencruciano opposita*"; quoted in the preface to Johann Valentin Andreae, *Christianopolis*, ed. and trans. Edward H. Thompson, *International Archives of the History of Ideas*, 162 (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1999), 63 and n. 167.

⁵³ See Gilly, *Cimelia Rhodostauritica*, 159–61 and illustration 287. The friends included Tobias Hess and Christoph Besold.

tradition of Christian mysticism, as the literal satire leads to a higher level. Even then, after we have recognized Christian as a model of Christian humility,⁵⁴ we cannot wholly trust him. He disappears after all, his story left in the hands of the ingenious editor.

One feature of satires like Lucian's *Hermotimus* and *Icaromenippus* is that the narrator shows good common sense, but only while telling the most outrageous lies. Although Menippus is a model of clear thinking, he is also something of a rogue, and without a moral anchor the satires force readers to think for themselves. In the *Hochzeit*, Christian presents higher authorities than himself—including the virgin who presides over the wedding, the king's astronomer and advisor Atlas, and the old man in the tower who directs the alchemical work—and the attention shifts to them as the tale unfolds. The first three days have more satire, involving process of choosing and being chosen. The last three have more comedy, as the story moves from its crisis, with the beheading of the entire royal family, to its resolution with the creation of new life.⁵⁵

In another sense, what begins as a fairly literal story of invitation and screening during the first three days becomes increasingly an allegory of alchemical recreation and spiritual union. The royal wedding becomes not only a chemical wedding but a sacred wedding or *hierosgamos*. The deaths on the fourth day belong to rituals as ancient as that of Venus and Adonis, whose death was mourned every spring in the ancient Middle East—rituals of dying and reviving gods such as those which Frazer investigated.⁵⁶ They also belong to the Easter story invoked in the book's first sentence. Over the course of a week, Christian goes from his hermitage to the royal castle and then back home. The journey out on day two takes him over a terrain where he must choose the right path. The return to Christian's humble hermitage occurs only in the final note, after the text has broken off, but it starts with the departure from the castle and the voyage to the isle of Olympus and the alchemical tower there. At the center of the story is the reception in the royal palace itself; and during the reception there is a play in seven acts, mirroring the seven days and in some ways serving as a commentary on the whole tale. The play is a comedy inasmuch as the boy (or young king who

⁵⁴ Compare the comments on Christian humility in Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, trans. Aloysius Croft and Harold Bolton (1940; Mineola, NY: Dover, 2003), 3; 1.2: "To think always of oneself as nothing, and always to think well and highly of others is the best and most perfect wisdom." Cf. Phil. 2:3.

⁵⁵ Especially for the narrative structure I have greatly benefited from discussions with James Carscallen, Emeritus Professor of English at Victoria College in the University of Toronto.

⁵⁶ James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* (London: Macmillan, 1922), 324–46.

loses his fiancée to an evil Moorish king) gets the girl in the end. But it features five entr'actes, two of which are full of biblical symbolism and take the story to a higher level altogether. The earthly story of love and strife, east and west, has a higher parallel in the apocalypitics of Daniel's dream interpretation, following the third and fourth acts.⁵⁷ The whole entertainment affords only one occasion for laughter. In the interlude after the fifth act, a chorus of fools enters. Each fool carries a piece of wood, and they quickly assemble the pieces to make a globe representing the world. Then they pull it apart just as quickly. "It was a fine sportive Phantasie," says Christian,⁵⁸ and it suggests just how impermanent the world really is. The fantasy recalls the globe that Atlas had displayed in the royal garden on day three (79).

Another fool circulates in the royal court, appearing on the same day. Even before Christian sees him at his mother's bed the next morning, "little *Cupid*" flies about the assembly of guests. He shoots most of his arrows at couples, but does not spare Christian or other single men and women (103). They too are moral, after all, and subject to temptations of the flesh. Cupid is a sort of court fool, permitted to propose a toast to the wedding guests after they have been tricked by the virgin and separated from their female escorts (108). He holds the train for one of the queens as she comes to see the play (110). During the rather solemn dinner after the play, he shows no sense of decorum. Christian says, "Almost all the Prattle at this Banquet was made by little Cupid, who could not leave us (and me indeed especially) untormented." The torment, of course, is that of earthly love, from which Christian has found he is not immune. Cupid even "mocked" the king "and played his waggish tricks" at the moment when the king "could not be heartily Merry" (119). Like the actors in the play, and the fools in the fourth interlude, Cupid is tied to the physical world in ways that we start to suspect are not the most desirable.

Cupid only laughs aloud on the next day, when Christian uncovers his mother's nakedness. But he makes merry throughout the second half of the *Hochzeit*. When a group of sirens sing their song to the wedding party, as it sails toward the Island of Olympus on day five, Christian reports, "*Cupid* began to work with me too, which yet tended but very little to my credit" (138). Christian realizes that the wound is as much intellectual and sexual, related to the curiosity that he showed while "loitering about *Venus's* Bed" (139). When the alchemical work has been

⁵⁷ *Hermetick Romance*, 114, 116; see Dan. 2: 31–45 and 7: 1–28. The reference to a fourth kingdom in the end times is echoed in the *Fama*; see *Fame and Confessio*, 28.

⁵⁸ *Hermetick Romance*, 116. Translation or modernization of the German text is problematic. Each fool carries *ein Stücken*, which could be a "stick" (*Stechen* or *Stock*) but also a "piece" of the puzzle (*Stück*) or a small sack (*Säckchen*) containing pieces. The stick would be appropriate—fools are often scourged for their folly, as swindlers are to be beaten with rods (*Ruten*) on day three—but it would be hard to make a globe from sticks.

performed on day six, it is Cupid that awakens the sleeping couple (205). Cupid then sails back to the castle with the “Young Royal Persons” thus created, while the guests remain on the island for the night (205–06). He makes a final appearance when the guests return to the castle on day seven. The old man of the tower presents “a curious small casket” to Atlas, which Cupid bears as he hovers between those two sages (211). Later that day, when the guests hear the rules of the Order of the Golden Stone, Cupid is said to be absent (217). He belongs in the world of matter, and the guests are about to be initiated into a spiritual order.

With Cupid out of the way, Christian can contemplate the prospect of a spiritual wedding. He has performed the chemical wedding by helping to produce the new life and understanding what he is doing. He has also caught the notice of the unnamed “Dutches,” who he says “surpassed the *Bride*; and she afterwards ruled the whole Wedding” (93). She represents a higher power, but, like Christian, makes “her self extream humble.”⁵⁹ When he has achieved all that was expected of him, he could rightly hope for such a reward, but that would require him to stay on at the castle in some capacity, and the wedding was to be only an episode in his spiritual journey. On the figurative level of interpretation, Christian may be said to have wedded her when he chooses to return home. For in a story like his, the home you leave is never the same when you return.

When the reader realizes that the wedding is exactly what his title says—the chemical wedding of Christian Rosencreutz—Andreae gets the last laugh. His story has disrupted our expectations at the outset, when the hero of the Rosicrucian *Fama* appears as a humble guest at a royal wedding. However, we end up getting what we first expected, only not a physical union but a spiritual one, a *unio mysticalis*. When we laugh with recognition that we were fooled once and have now been fooled again, we laugh in a way that is only possible on a second reading or at a second level of reading. As we realize that the first-person narrative was a *ludibrium*, and Christian Rosencreutz a fiction, we join Andreae in the laughter at those who continue to be fooled. It is a gentler laughter than it might have been, and we are less prone to scorn, because we ourselves have been fooled.

* * *

The laughter in the *Chymische Hochzeit* comes from several directions. Much of it comes from above. Most obviously, it comes when the castle officials watch the weighing of guests, and see that the rulers of this world prove to be lightweight and the learned doctors airheads. This laughter is mocking and, to use an older

⁵⁹ Montgomery identifies her as “Faith”; see *Cross and Crucible*, 383, n. 4. But she is also Wisdom, Holiness, and (as I would call her) Grace.

English word, *ludibrious*. But there is a gentle laughter from above, laughter that is not *at* the guests but *with* the best of them. It comes from the matron in Christian's first dream, who sees his shackles but wants him to realize that they will not keep him from the wedding. It comes from the virgin who sees that he has withdrawn from the weighing, certain that he is the least of men. It comes from his personal page, who sees that he sets excessively high standards for himself. It comes from the master alchemist, who sees his confusion about what is meant, after all, to be a mystery. It comes from even higher, as Cupid exposes and then corrects Christian's desires for both carnal and spiritual knowledge. This laughter is playful, being made to encourage the weary pilgrim. Christian has already laughed at himself, when the virgin has made light of his advanced age. Now he can laugh at the human condition, joining the other guests in realizing that all men are subject to the will of God and may not prolong life when God is not willing.

When Christian can laugh at himself, he can laugh at the whole story as a sort of extended dream. He can step outside of it, as one can leave a dream behind when one awakens. This helps to explain the problematic ending, where we have one final form of laughter: a laughter outside of the text itself.

Before the initiation ceremony on day seven, Christian is placed in a serious dilemma. He learns that the porter who admitted him to the castle grounds, on day two, was the astrologer for the former king. The old astrologer has been relegated to the castle's first gate as "*punishment*" for "*having on a time committed a fault against Venus, and [having] beheld her in her Bed of rest*" (213). Now that Christian has committed the same offense, the porter asks the new king to be relieved of his gate duty. The king lets Christian decide what he will do, and Christian agrees to accept the punishment, heeding the Pauline injunction is to bear the other man's burden (Gal. 6: 2). But he does so reluctantly, reflecting that he will not live to see another royal wedding and so will never return to his cottage and his "thankful Schollars." Heavily conflicted, he retires for the night, but instead of a dream or vision he has a revelation. He can go home again. The text breaks off with these words: "*Here are wanting about two Leaves in quarto, and he (the Author hereof) wherefore he imagined he must in the morning be Door-Keeper, returned home*" (226).

Many have wondered why Christian would go back on his word, and how he could leave the friendly porter in the lurch. There is probably no satisfactory answer on the literal level, but on the symbolic level of dream interpretation Christian must have realized that he *is* the old porter—the wise astrologer obsessed with the mysteries of Cupid and Venus, that is, of love and life. The two men are bound to each other by their overwhelming desire to uncover Venus, that is, to see the truth of nature. They both stand accused by Cupid, but not for the alchemists' cupidity, which is the greed for gold. They stand accused of the

theologians' concupiscence, inasmuch as they have both loved the objects of the creation more than the Creator. Christian sees that he can free himself by freeing his other self in the visionary dream. His homecoming is instantaneous because in a sense he has never left his humble cottage.

Christian is an astrologer himself, after all, and has predicted the wedding "by the account and calculation of the *Planets*" (6–7). He has even understood how the wedding would occur, when he went outdoors on the night after day five. "Thus having good opportunity to consider better of Astronomy," he relates, "I found that this present Night there would happen such a conjunction of the Planets, the like to which was not otherwise suddenly to be observed" (141). During the Easter season of 1459, European astronomers witnessed a conjunction of Mercury and Venus in the north northwest and a nearly simultaneous conjunction of Mars and Jupiter in the south southeast.⁶⁰ The two conjunctions are said to reach their peak at 1:00 and 2:00 p.m. local time on the sixth day, precisely as the alchemical work is being performed (159). The conjunction of Mercury and Venus allows the first stage in the production of the homunculi, the bringing of life to matter. Then, the conjunction of Mars and Jupiter, representing archetypal figures of might and power, brings the royalty of the recently beheaded to the alchemical project. Because they are royal the homunculi are said to excel the figure of Venus herself.⁶¹

In addition to being quite the astrologer himself, Christian has committed the same "fault" as the old porter. Intellectual curiosity leads him to explore the royal library and vault toward the end of day three, while the other remaining guests stroll through the public gardens. The king admonishes him, and he refrains from telling readers what he discovered. He says only that he saw the phoenix and learned "more than is extant in all *Books*," though he later adds that he saw an inscription regarding Mercury, the god and the metal, before it was revealed to others the next morning (75, 97). Neither the king's warning nor the hint that all will be revealed in due course can stop Christian from following his page "down certain steps underground" on the morning of day five (126). (The page is said to be a clever one and seems almost an extension of Christian's personality.) The page stops at an open door, on which there is a cryptic inscription, and remarks that it was shut until the coffins were removed the previous evening. He deciphers the inscription, which says, "*Here . . . lies Buried, Lady Venus, that Beauty which hath undone many a great Man*" (128). He then leads Christian down a further level,

⁶⁰ I owe this detail to a posting on MadSci Network, 20 May 1999, at: <http://www.madsci.org/posts/archives/1999-05/927217827.As.r.html> (last accessed on Jan. 30, 2010).

⁶¹ For the use of classical mythology in alchemy see Thomas Willard, "The Metamorphoses of Metals: Ovid and the Alchemists," in *Metamorphosis: The Changing Face of Ovid in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. Alison Keith and Stephen Rupp (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2007), 151–63.

telling him he has nothing to fear "As long as the Royal Persons are still at rest" (129). They come to the bed of Venus and to another tablet, which the page also deciphers: "When the Tree (said he) shall be quite melted down, Then shall Lady Venus awake, and be the Mother of a King" (130). This is the philosophical tree on which the elements are represented as children of the sun. The inscription is the counterpart of the inscription revealed the day before, about Mercury and its healing power.⁶² The message is that the true work of alchemy is not the making of gold but the restoration of life.⁶³ It is a message to be revealed in the tower, where Christian sees Cupid once more. But Christian has been overly curious; he has sought knowledge is he not yet allowed to have.

When we recognize the spiritual identity of Christian and the old porter, we are no longer reading the *Hochzeit* on the literal level. And indeed, like many works of medieval and early modern spirituality, the *Hochzeit* is polysemous, open to interpretation on several levels. Literally, it tells the story of Christian's attendance at a royal wedding, where he proves the worthiest of guests and the dearest to the royal couple. Allegorically, it tells of the alchemical marriage of spirit and matter, heaven and earth. Morally or figuratively, it tells of Christian's own wedding, suggesting that the work's title is more accurate than it seems at first. Finally, on the anagogic level, it tells of God's call and the Christian response. Christian's recognition that he is the old porter and has a permanent place in the castle is our recognition that the tale works at these higher levels. Because readers have their laugh of recognition only after Christian's narrative has broken off, they are reminded that the entire story has been told by an illuminated Christian and are thus advised to re-read the story of his chemical wedding.

* * *

The *Chymische Hochzeit* has fallen into obscurity, known mainly to people who care more about the history behind the character of Christian Rosencreutz than in the strange story that this persona narrates. The tale has one genuinely literary offspring, however, and a brief comparison may help to explain what all the laughter is about.

Goethe read the *Hochzeit* when he was nineteen, the very age at which Andreae said he wrote the story. Nearly twenty years later, he read it again and told a friend he could see in Andreae's allegory the makings of "a good fairy tale to tell

⁶² *Hermetick Romance*, 98. The reference to "HERMES PRINCEPS" includes Hermes Trismegistus, the traditional father of alchemy and hermeticism, as well as Mercury as god, planet, and metal.

⁶³ The *Fama* has the similar message about "accursed Gold-making" as strictly secondary to the work of philosophy (*Fame and Confession*, 29 and following).

at the right time.”⁶⁴ Still later, he wrote his famous *Märchen* as the last tale in a sort of Germanic *Decameron*.⁶⁵ Like Andreae’s tale, Goethe’s *Märchen* leads up to a sacred wedding or *hierosgamos*, though Goethe’s unites nature in the character of a beautiful lily with human nature in a handsome, virtuous prince. The story begins, rather improbably, with two tall will-o’-wisps or marsh lights (German *Illichter*), who laugh uproariously and sprinkle gold coins about themselves as if they were made of light. They create all kinds of difficulties in their haste to see the beautiful lily in her garden, but by the time they leave the story’s world is completely transformed. Goethe’s tale is by no means a simple one, but it seems clear that the laughter and merriment (*Gelächter* and *Lust*) are essential to the transformation and that the strange lights are agents of change. So, it seems, are the laughing page, the laughing Cupid, even the laughing clowns in the fourth day’s entertainment. Invited to the royal wedding, Christian responds, but he might never have understood its true meaning had he not been forced first to confront his own human weaknesses—physical, emotional, and intellectual. The two dozen episodes of laughter in his tale are often unsettling, but he has to accept the laughter, relate it for his readers, and ultimately join in it for his own transformation to be complete.

⁶⁴ Adam McLean, “Commentary,” Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Fairy Tale of the Green Snake and the Golden Lily*, trans. Donald McLean. *Magnum Opus Hermetic Sourceworks*, 14 (Grand Rapids, MI: Phanes, 1993), 46. See also Ronald D. Gray, *Goethe the Alchemist* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952), 163–81.

⁶⁵ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, “The Fairy Tale,” in *Collected Works*, Vol. 10.1, *Conversations of German Refugees and Wilhelm Meister’s Journeyman Years*, ed. Jane K. Brown (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1995), 70–92.

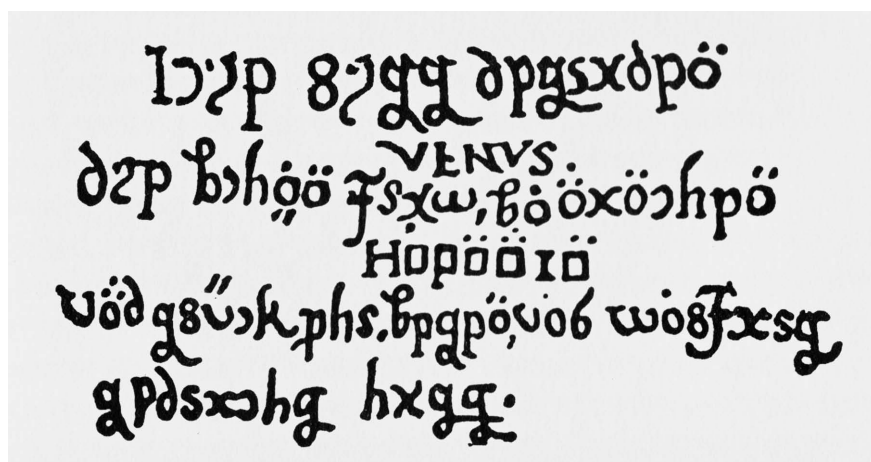


Figure 1: Cipher on the door leading to the castle crypt. From *Chymische Hochzeit Christiani Rosencreutz* (Strasbourg: Lazarus Zetzner, 1616)

Chapter 28

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The Comic Power of Illusion-Allusion: Laughter, *La Devineresse*, and the Scandal of a Glorious Century

It is commonplace among historians of seventeenth-century Europe to present the Sun King, Louis XIV of France, as the greatest, most glorious king who has ever lived, an ideal for every other monarch, all of whom were motivated in some degree to emulate the accomplishments of his reign: the military triumphs, the fine manners and fashion, literature, arts and architecture. Intent on achieving a reputation of glory and keeping it forever, Louis was assisted by legions of writers, artists, and craftsmen who worked toward that end under the influence, and sometimes under the very direction, of his minister Jean Colbert, who was in charge of his master's affairs from 1661 until his death in 1683.¹

This policy of self-aggrandizement, which went hand-in-hand with military and political initiatives designed to further the same ends, was not impervious to embarrassing occurrences—what we might today call public relations disasters. One startling example was a lady in Paris who obtained poisons from her lover, reportedly tested them on her cat and her husband, and then undertook to secure a rich inheritance by poisoning her father and her brothers: the Marquise de Brinvilliers.

Such crimes could not be permitted. The king's law enforcement officers acted with remarkable initiative in the way in which they discovered her whereabouts in a foreign jurisdiction, enticed her from her secure hiding-place, repatriated her, and attempted to make her confess by administering the water torture until her stomach nearly burst. Afterwards, they executed her. Justice was seen to be done,

¹ See, for example, Peter Burke, *The Fabrication of Louis XIV* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1982).

and this ghastly criminal could be consigned to the historical record as an exception in Louis's elegant, noble, enlightened Catholic France.²

But then, just a few years later, the glorious king of France was to learn that what he may have thought was exceptional was in fact rampant. Catherine Monvoisin, known familiarly as La Voisin, together with numerous other so-called *devineresses* (fortune-tellers), had been marketing their potions and performing sacrilegious masses for years. La Voisin's clientele were not only the low-life of Paris, but also France's privileged, the gentlemen and duchesses, the dukes and the courtiers, who visited fortune-tellers not simply to have their fortunes told but in order to secure their fortunes. Among those accused were the Duchesse de Bouillon and the Duchesse de Soissons, Superintendent of the Queen's Household, as well as the Duc de Luxembourg, one of the foremost generals in the king's army, and many others even including the sister-in-law of Mme de Montespan, mistress and favorite of His Majesty. Over time, it came to the king's notice that La Voisin's alleged clients may have included even the Favorite herself, bearer of no fewer than seven of his children.

That is the context, the history in a nutshell of what is popularly termed the Affair of the Poisons, a scandal so dreadful—and so embarrassing—that the King of France did everything in his power to keep the accusations, investigations, and the trial secret.³ In fact, the popular term is somewhat of a misnomer, for it only partially represents the crimes that were uncovered: fraud, counterfeiting, blasphemy, black masses incorporating the sacrifice of infants, abortion, murder, and lethal conspiracy, even extending to plots against the monarch himself.

All of which leads us at last, in this volume devoted to laughter, to *La Devineresse, ou les Faux Enchantements* (The Fortuneteller, or the False Enchantments), by Thomas Corneille and Jean Donneau de Visé,⁴ the longest-

² The story of Mme de Brinvilliers frequently features as an *hors d'œuvre* in books about the Affair of the Poisons, several of which are alluded to below.

³ There is no paucity of historical accounts. The best of them are Frantz Funck-Brentano, *Le Drame des poisons* (Paris: Hachette, 1899), translated as *Princes and Poisoners: Studies of the Court of Louis XIV* (London: Duckworth, 1901); Nancy Mitford, *The Sun King: Louis XIV at Versailles* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966); Frances Mossiker, *The Affair of the Poisons* (London: Gollancz, 1969); Jean-Christian Petitfils, *L'Affaire des Poisons: Alchimistes et sorciers sous Louis XIV* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1977); Robert Ambelain, *La Chapelle des damnés: 1650–1703* (Paris: Laffont, 1983); and Anne Somerset, *The Affair of the Poisons: Murder, Infanticide and Satanism at the Court of Louis XIV* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2003).

⁴ There are two modern editions of the play: Thomas Corneille and Jean Donneau de Visé, *La Devineresse*, ed. P. J. Yarrow (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1971); and Thomas Corneille and Jean Donneau de Visé, *La Devineresse*, ed. Julia Prest (London: Modern Humanities Research Association, 2007). The English dialogue cited has been adapted from an unpublished translation by William Brooks. No published literal translation of *La Devineresse* exists. I am grateful for Professor Brooks's permission to use his translation and for his advice on aspects of this paper.

running, financially most successful play of its century, by those criteria more successful, even, than any comedy by Molière.⁵ How do we explain the ongoing presentations of this play, its subject matter and its lead character, a fictional fortune-teller called Mme Jobin, undeniably based on the real and notorious La Voisin? How could Louis XIV, obsessed with his reputation for *gloire*, allow performances of a work portraying an appalling blight on Paris society and his realm? He was certainly prepared to intervene decisively on other occasions when the subject-matter of a play seemed offensive or inimical to his interests or to the public good, as shown by the steps he took to ban Molière's *Tartuffe* for several years in the 1660's until (it is thought) its author watered down the most extreme aspects of its cynical view of religion.

Later, Louis was to expel the Italian actors from Paris in 1697 for performing a play that insulted Mme de Maintenon, and later still, in 1703, he caused Boindin's comedy *Le Bal d'Auteuil* to be banned because of its sexually explicit content.⁶ Why then not in 1679–1680? Why not in response to this play, which ran for four months and was frequently revived throughout his reign?

The answer frequently given is that in both its first run and subsequent re-runs—indeed, whenever it was performed—*La Devineresse* was announced and publicized as a comedy.⁷ And so it has continued. Critics routinely judge it as a slight, relatively innocent comedy, a “machine play,”⁸ “comedy of manners,”⁹ or

⁵ On the extraordinary box-office success of the play, see Yarrow, *La Devineresse: Comédie*, xiv; and Mossiker, *Affair of the Poisons*, 165, who declares that the actors broke all records.

⁶ Will and Ariel Durant observe, of *Tartuffe*, that “Louis . . . having seen the comedy in its private performance . . . withheld permission to present it to the public of Paris in [Molière's own theater]” (*The Age of Louis XIV: A History of European Civilization in the period of Pascal, Molière, Cromwell, Milton, Peter the Great, Newton and Spinoza* [New York: Simon & Schuster, 1963], 114). For the expulsion of the Italian actors, see William Brooks, “Louis XIV's Dismissal of the Italians: the Episode of *La Fausse Prude*,” *Modern Language Review* 91 (1996): 840–47. On *Le Bal d'Auteuil*, see William Brooks and P. J. Yarrow: *The Dramatic Criticism of Elizabeth Charlotte, Duchesse d'Orléans, with an annotated chronology of performances of the popular and court theatre in France (1671–1722), reconstructed from her letters* (Lewiston, NY, Queenston, Ontario, and Lampeter, Wales: Edwin Mellen Press, 1996), 198.

⁷ Pierre Mèlèse inventories eight listings from Visé's monthly gazette *Le Mercure galant* between October 1679 and January 1710. See *Répertoire Analytique des documents contemporains d'information et de critique concernant le théâtre à Paris sous Louis XIV, 1659–1715* (Paris: Droz, 1934), 169.

⁸ Henry Carrington Lancaster, *A History of French Dramatic Literature in the Seventeenth Century*. Part IV, *The Period of Racine, 1673–1700*. 2 vols. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1940), 2:909, 919. The author describes the “pièce à machines” as a play “that placed the chief emphasis on the scenery and mechanical devices.”

⁹ Gustave Reynier, writing in 1892, explains the dual nature of the play as “à la fois une pièce à machines et une pièce de circonstance” (“at one and the same time a machine play and a play of the moment”). See Reynier, *Thomas Corneille: Sa Vie et son théâtre* (Paris: Hachette, 1892), 24.

“comedy-fantasy,”¹⁰ filled with entertaining tricks and spectacles, a “satire,”¹¹ even an innocent morality play meant to teach audience not to be so gullible.¹² Indeed, while de Visé himself claimed that the actors of the Guénégaud Theater suggested the idea for the play,¹³ at least three respected historians say it may have come from none other than the King’s minister of justice Nicolas de la Reynie.¹⁴

But I characterize the play somewhat differently. To me it is a dark comedy, one of the darkest there is, tragedy in the guise of humor. All the testimonies, all the opinions, to which I have referred so far, rely in some sense on what one might call the external evidence—the wider historical context, contemporary reports, and publicity—with a probability that each historian may have somewhat hastily settled for adopting the opinions expressed by his or her predecessors. To support the alternate view expressed in this paper, I call upon the play’s text, the immediate social context, and the subtext.

Let us begin with the plot. *La Devineresse* consists of a series of scenes in which men and women from various walks of life seek the counsel and other more practical services of a fortune-teller in order to attain the objects of their greatest desires: money, courage, and love. That seems innocent enough. The playwrights depended on actors, props, costumes, and scenery in ways that cleverly parallel the parlors of the fortune-tellers they mocked. There is a coterie of characters, lords and ladies, lackeys and maids, disguising themselves with makeup and costumes; sneaking in and out of doorways and passing magically through walls, revealing secrets about their masters and mistresses within a handy use of exposition. The set of the play, Mme Jobin’s parlor, becomes a theater within a theater, filled with role-play, amusing plots, and tricks. The audience, no less than a sorceress’s clientele, proves willing to suspend disbelief and fall prey to fantasy.

In the first scene, the exposition focuses on a subplot involving lost pistols, a topic that will not reappear until the end of the act.¹⁵ Corneille and de Visé were experienced playwrights. Why is there discussion of a trick planned for locating the pistols this early? Not only does the timing seem odd; it is striking that the play begins by referring to a search for a type of a deadly weapon instead of a relatively

¹⁰ Mossiker, *Affair of the Poisons*, 165.

¹¹ Pierre Mélése, *Le Théâtre et le public à Paris sous Louis XIV, 1659–1715* (Paris: Droz, 1934), 282.

¹² Yarrow, *La Devineresse*, vi.

¹³ “Les Comédiens m’ayant pressé, avec de fortes instances, de mettre après la mort de Madame Voisin, tout ce qui s’étoit passé chez elle pendant sa vie, à l’occasion du métier dont elle s’étoit mêlée” (Visé, in *Le Mercure galant*, January 1710: 281, in a eulogy devoted to his collaborator Thomas Corneille, who had died in the previous month; emphasis mine), also quoted in David A. Collins *Thomas Corneille: Protean Dramatist* (The Hague: Mouton, 1966), 24.

¹⁴ Funck-Brentano, *Princes and Poisoners*, 364–65; Pierre Mélése, *Un Homme de lettres au temps du Grand Roi: Donneau de Visé, fondateur du Mercure Galant* (Paris: Droz, 1936), 153; Mossiker, *Affair of the Poisons*, 165.

¹⁵ All page and line numbers refer to P. J. Yarrow’s edition of the play; in this case, page 9, line 6.

innocent item like a buckle, a timepiece or a pair of earrings, items that were preferred by La Fontaine for his contemporaneous fable, "Les Devineries."¹⁶ Why pistols? Coincidentally, or deliberately, the play ends with the use of a pistol, an aspect of authorial choice to which I shall return.

Immediately following the exposition, the first client arrives: the Countess of Astragon, who has been wondering whether to marry a marquis extremely skeptical of the fortune-teller's powers. In Act I, Scene ii, Mme Jobin rationalizes her choice to prevent the marriage by explaining, "Il ne faut pas estre plus grande Sorciere que moy pour dire une verité, en prédisant des malheurs à ceux qui ont l'entestement de se marier" ("You don't have to be a cleverer sorceress than I to predict unhappiness for people who decide to get married").¹⁷ The sentiment may be pessimistic, but it is clearly meant as humorous. On the surface, our protagonist seems to resemble a female Scapin, Scaramouche, or other clever, mischievous leading character. Yet as early as Act I, Scene vi, as Mme Jobin tries to get rid of the skeptical marquis who has disguised himself as a servant, she says, "[Les laquais] jasant . . . je n'aimerois pas qu'on dist dans le Monde que je me mesle de plus que de regarder dans la main" ("Servants gossip. I would not like it spread around that I do anything more than read palms").¹⁸ Are we to interpret this simply as if she does not want to be misrepresented? Or, as if she does rather more than just read palms?

The second client to call is Monsieur Gilet, a coward. He wants to win love by proving how brave he is. Mme Jobin gives him what she says is a special sword and fools him into believing it is all he needs. She gets a purse full of gold, and Gilet immediately transforms into a stock comic character like the braggart capitano of the *commedia dell'arte*. His bravado and the absurd instructions he follows on how to hold the sword are so exaggerated that the scene is hilarious and, yes, all still seems relatively innocent—except that, once again, the authors have chosen to focus on a potentially lethal weapon: from pistols to a sword, with this warning made by Mme Jobin and later repeated by Gilet: "Quand vous ne feriez que fraper vostre Ennemy à la jambe, le coup iroit droit au cœur" ("Even if you only strike your enemy in the leg, the blow will go straight to his heart").¹⁹ The notion of deadly danger is reinforced by La Fontaine's later statement, or rather humorous understatement, that "un Homme tué met les Gens en peine" ("dead bodies upset people").²⁰

¹⁶ Jean de La Fontaine, *Fables: Livres I à VI* (Paris: Gallimard, 1974), 236.

¹⁷ Yarrow, 12.13–15.

¹⁸ Yarrow, 18.4–8.

¹⁹ Act I, Scene xi (Yarrow, 29.13–14).

²⁰ Act I, Scene xiii (Yarrow, 33.14–15).

And so we go from client to client, including a peasant girl in Act II, Scene v, who finds it necessary to beat around the bush until she finally admits she wants to increase the size of her breasts.

Now let us turn to the immediate social context.

La Devineresse opened in November 1679 and its first run took place while the real fortune-teller La Voisin was being interrogated and tortured.²¹ The play was presented throughout the period leading to La Voisin's death, and in February 1680, the month in which she was executed, the text itself was published.²² Performances continued on the Guénégaud stage while testimony continued in the *chambre ardente*, the black-curtained room lit by candles where specially selected judges heard evidence about attempted murder and ritual sacrifice. Drama played out in both places, and no matter how many decrees and instructions Louis issued to keep details of the trial confidential, gossip reigned. As Mme de Sévigné wrote in letters to her daughter, "On ne parle d'autre chose" ("Paris talks of little else").²³ During the trial, the accused fortune-tellers and their assistants and collaborators insisted their activities were all very innocent; just as in Act II, La Jobin insists that "tout ce que je fais est fort innocent."²⁴ She declares this despite her many instances of ambiguous dialogue and double-entendres, such as: "Quand une femme a eu quelque temps l'incommodité d'un vieux Barbon, il est bien juste de luy aider à se marier selon son cœur" ("If a woman suffers too long the inconvenience of an old husband, is it not fair game to help her achieve a marriage of the heart?").²⁵ Stronger still: "Il se peut qu'il y en ait d'autres qui se meslent de plus que je ne vous dis" ("And what if there are those who want to get more involved than I have described to you?").²⁶

To help us grasp the significance of the words "qui se meslent de plus" ("who get more involved"), we are given subtextual clues, and these are what I call the illusion-allusions in the comedy. Particularly in the latter half of the play, after the comic tone has been established, the various tricks played by La Jobin seem increasingly to encompass meanings beyond the literal. A devil, impersonated by La Jobin's brother, walks through a wall, mysteriously entering our world whether clients wish to encounter him or not. We also see a talking head. Let the audience

²¹ And not, therefore, after her death, as de Visé intimates in the quotation already given from his eulogy of his collaborator.

²² Mèlèse, *Le Théâtre et le public*, 282, and Lancaster, *History of French Dramatic Literature*, Part IV, 1:45.

²³ Mme de Sévigné expresses this idea more than once in letters to her daughter (e.g., January 31 and February 2, 1680). The translation cited is from *The Letters of Madame de Sévigné*, with an Introduction by A. Edward Newton (Philadelphia: Horn, 1927), IV, 313, 318, 336–37, 359.

²⁴ Yarrow, 42.18–19.

²⁵ Yarrow, 40.3–5.

²⁶ Yarrow, 42.16–18.

marvel at the magic. Let them try to guess how each effect is achieved. Curtains. Ropes and pulleys. A zig-zag or extensible pantographic arm. Mirrors. Or, in the extraordinary effect that ends Act II, hidden tubing and inflatable pillows—an illusion-allusion that truly must have startled, if we consider the following: to impress a potential client by demonstrating her ability to provide special services, Mme Jobin has a servant woman who is one of her assistants arrive on stage “vestuë en Dame extraordinairement enflée,” that is, padded to look exceptionally fat.²⁷

Claiming that the doctors have been unable to help this bloated woman, she says she can deflate her stomach by passing the fat onto a man. After this has been done, the woman cries, “Je sens que l’enflure s’en va . . . Je desenfle, ah, ah, ah! . . . Je suis guérie. Quelle joie! Ce n’est point assez que trente loáis qui sont dans ma Bourse” (“The fat is going away . . . I am being defatted, ah, ah, ah! I am cured. What a relief. These thirty gold louis in my purse really aren’t enough for what you have done for me”).²⁸ Abortion? What else could Corneille and de Visé be hinting at? Let the audience ponder what is happening when a woman arrives at Mme Jobin’s house with an enlarged belly and leaves thin.

The ending of the next act features an illusion-allusion that is at least as elaborate and dark. Mme Jobin decides to frighten the skeptical marquis so that he will never again doubt her wizardry. She produces thunder and lightning to capture his attention and doubtless to try to scare him. Then, as she walks toward the fireplace and turns toward the hearth, objects begin to fall down the chimney. The objects? Body parts. A leg. An arm. A torso. Imagine ladies in the audience gasping or turning away! However entertaining, the illusion must have been shocking to see, but not as shocking as its significance. Those in-the-know would understand the allusion to the discovery of body parts buried in the real La Voisin’s garden or found in her oven: “charred, cracked bones dug up from makeshift graves, skeletal remains of an estimated two thousand five-hundred aborted or sacrificed infants,” writes Frances Mossiker. She goes on to say: “Insofar as such statistics can be accurately compiled, no single individual—acting alone—has ever accounted for such a carnage as La Voisin. By her own admission . . . the ashes of some twenty-five hundred infants or embryos . . . were fertilizing the soil of her . . . suburban villa.”²⁹

Did Corneille and de Visé intend to allude to such horrors? Almost certainly so, for, after all, the February 1680 issue of de Visé’s own monthly gazette *Le Mercure galant* immodestly described the play’s realism as one of its chief virtues: “On croit

²⁷ Act II, Scene xi (Yarrow, 58).

²⁸ Act II, Scene xii (Yarrow, 63.11–12, 64.5–7).

²⁹ Mossiker, *Affair of the Poisons*, 173. The author notes this despite, as cited above, calling *La Devinresse* as a comedy-fantasy.

voir une vérité au lieu d'une comédie" ("You believe you are watching the truth rather than a play").³⁰

In Act III, Scene iv, another noteworthy scene, Mme Jobin recommends that a client send a letter to an interfering, disagreeable father: "Quand j'auray fait quelque cérémonie sur le papier, écrivez. Pourvû qu'il touche la Lettre, vous verrez la suite" ("Wait till I put a spell on the paper, then write to him. Provided he touches the letter, you'll see the results").³¹ The real fortune-teller, La Voisin, was accused of lacing poisons into fabric and paper, including onto a petition she intended to hand to the King.

How do the authors finally expose the truth about Mme Jobin/Voisin? In the final act, they again resort to a pistol. It is by the power of a pistol that the skeptical marquis confronts Mme Jobin's brother who has been disguised as a devil (Act V, Scene v). By threatening him and demanding, "Parle ou je te tuë" ("Speak, or I will kill you!"), the marquis succeeds in wrenching a confession from the miscreants.³²

At least one modern critic has asked why the authors felt the need to use so violent a *deus ex machina* to expose the main character's deceptions and resolve the plot of this supposedly light comedy.³³ Is it too far-fetched, or is it merely reasonable, to suggest a parallel that justifies the lengths to which the law must go—threats of death and torture—to obtain confessions and details from the real suspects who had been arrested?

What may have blocked, misled, or confused commentators about the depth of the play's seriousness is that de Visé's monthly gazette and his voluminous histories represent a catalogue of excessive flatteries of Louis XIV. It is ironic, indeed, that this unremitting admirer of the Sun King has left a play that bears witness, albeit much of it in code, to the worst scandal in the reign. While we consider that irony, it is worth recalling another, for a woman known as la dame de Carada tried to use the services of the fortune-tellers to secure the death of a rival so that she might marry none other than de Visé's own brother.³⁴ One of the authors of this play, therefore, was himself among those indirectly affected by the schemes of La Voisin and her kind.

The fine line between frivolity and horror in *La Devineresse* is again recognizable in the final major illusion in the play. When the character Gosselin, Mme Jobin's brother, appears disguised as a devil and is confronted by the pistol-wielding Marquis, he insists he is a good devil. The irony, the absurdity of a good devil,

³⁰ Yarrow, xii.

³¹ Yarrow, 82.4–6.

³² Yarrow, 142.3.

³³ Nicholas Paige, "The Affair of the Poisons: Compulsory Curiosity and the Scandal of Belief." Oral presentation, SE-17 Conference, Orange, California, 1998.

³⁴ Yarrow, viii.

may be considered on many levels as a parallel to the simultaneously comic and frightening protagonist Mme Jobin. There is also the layered illusion of André Hubert, a man playing the role of a woman who pretends to have magical powers. Hubert/Jobin is costumed, disguised for the stage, an illusionistic representation of the real 'devil' La Voisin. By exposing this fraud of a fraud, Corneille and de Visé succeed in suggesting various layers of disguise, illusion, allusion, and hypocrisy.

Thus we may say that the laughter resulting from the authors' inventiveness parallels what the King's unequal justice and cover-up did for his splendid century: in both cases, the sordid underneath is disguised but it is not done away with. By the end of the century, there was certainly a change in how Louis XIV was regarded by the public. The admired and revered Sun King, resplendent in his *gloire*, would later be feared, despised, and even reviled by many of his subjects for his hubristic excesses, indulgence in adultery, financial waste, religious intolerance, and the bloodshed in his costly wars.³⁵

In the last but one line in the play, the Countess of Astragon tells the Marquis, "J'ay esté sa Dupe. Sortons d'icy. Vous aurez toute liberté d'en rire avec moy" ("She certainly had *me* fooled . . . From now on, we can laugh about it together.")³⁶ The final line seems to be a message from the authors: "Je me tiens assuré de mon bonheur, puis que j'ay eu l'avantage de vous détromper" ("I know I shall be happy, now that I have been able to make you see the truth").³⁷ We would do well to assess the whole play in the light of that concluding boast.

In our day and age, popular writers and entertainers have also found ways to cause us laugh at crime and deceit. Jay Leno's numerous jokes about O. J. Simpson's alleged innocence regarding the murder of his wife were broadcast and re-broadcast on NBC's *Tonight Show*. Skits on NBC's *Saturday Night Live* included a scene in which a reporter asks former Vice President Cheney whether he has regrets about the war in Iraq. "None at all," he replies. "Nor about the torture of prisoners?" "None at all." We could cry at being reminded about the choices made, but we laugh; it even helps us cope, perhaps feel superior and wise. We

³⁵ This evaluative reversal owes much to the work of Félix Gaiffe, *L'Envers du Grand Siècle* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1924), and characterizes many subsequent assessments of the reign, such as: W. H. Lewis, *The Splendid Century* (New York: Morrow, 1953); John B. Wolf, *Louis XIV* (New York: Norton, 1968); Michael, Prince of Greece, *Louis XIV: The Other Side of the Sun*. Trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Harper & Row, 1983); Olivier Bernier, *Louis XIV: A Royal Life* (New York: Doubleday, 1987); and Gilette Ziegler, *At the Court of Versailles: Eye-Witness Reports from the Reign of Louis XIV*. Trans. Simon Watson Taylor (New York: Dutton, 1968). It is to be detected even in such recent and generally favorable biographies as that of Anthony Levi, *Louis XIV* (New York: Carrol & Graf, 2004).

³⁶ Yarrow, 145.6–7.

³⁷ Yarrow, 145.8–9.

have books and films like *Wag the Dog* poking fun at a scheme using Hollywood to distract the public with a fake war, and *Primary Colors* about the philandering of a president and his ambitious wife's decision to look the other way. There is Comedy Central's *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report*. No, we will not be gullible; we will not be duped. We even manage to laugh at the bankers and mortgagers of American International Group, Inc., by identifying the corporation's acronym as Arrogance, Incompetence, Greed. Match that with the marquis' line in *La Devineresse*, "depuis le plus grand jusqu'au plus petit, tous les Personnages qu'on y jouë ne sont que pour avoir de l'argent" ("from the greatest in the land to the least, everyone . . . does what they do for money").³⁸

We feel special pride in a democracy that our freedom allows us to turn to ridicule issues of great seriousness. By contrast it is worth taking an opportunity to marvel how Corneille and de Visé managed to get away with it in a seventeenth-century absolute monarchy. Whether or not the initial idea came from the minister of justice, Nicolas de la Reynie, as suggested by Funck-Brentano and others,³⁹ and whatever Louis XIV's unfathomable reasons might have been not to exercise, on this occasion, his absolute power to prevent its ever being performed, we should admire *La Devineresse* as a daring play that shows how laughter can be used so effectively to convey dark and serious messages.

De Visé made no references in his monthly gazette or his volumes of history to the buried bones of infants or a poisons conspiracy against the Sun King; no mention of accusations of the use of potions and poisons made against Mme de Montespan or other courtiers close to the king. And yet, by writing and producing *La Devineresse*, and employing highly inventive illusion-allusions to provoke laughter in a context in which more serious discussion would never have been allowed, the author succeeded in projecting such matters into the public arena.

³⁸ Yarrow, 93.27–29.

³⁹ Yarrow, who stresses that it would be unwise to reject Funck-Brentano's hypothesis, none the less gives a series of reservations which show that it is far from essential to assume that La Reynie had to be the source of the idea (*Devineresse*, 150–51).

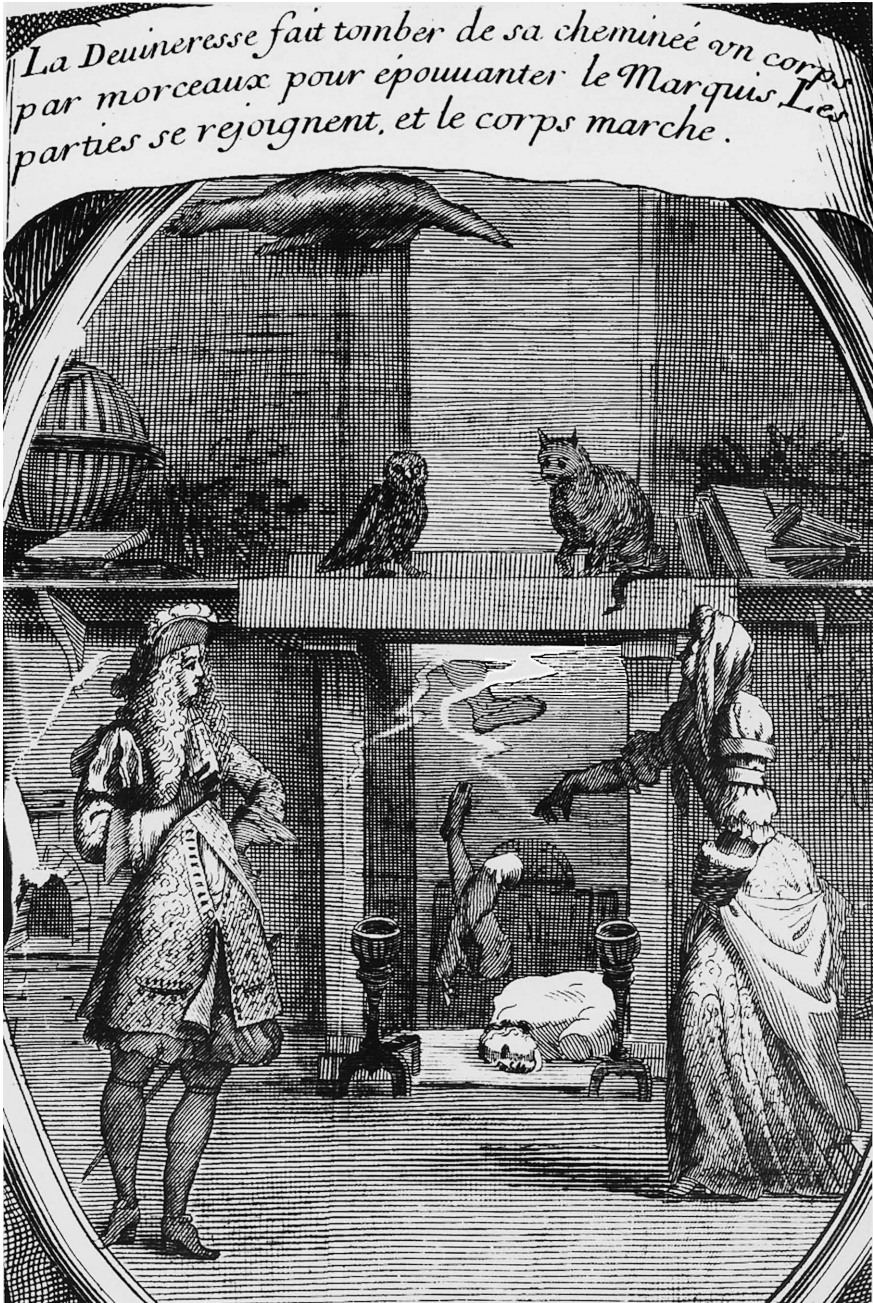


Figure 1: *La Devineresse*, 1st ed. (private collection)

Chapter 29

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Laughing at Credulity and Superstition in the Long Eighteenth Century

The long eighteenth-century (1650–1800) has been characterized as an age of dissembling, of masks and mistaken identities, of *trompe l'oeil* and theatricality, in which things and, more importantly, people were quite literally seldom what they seemed. Nowhere was this more apparent than in the concerted attack on all forms of deception and credulity, especially in the realm of religion, during the period. An awareness of the ease with which individuals assumed the false mask of piety was a stock theme in art, the theater, and literature, providing a great source of rueful wit in the unmasking of such characters as Molière's *Tartuffe* (1669); and exposing the credulity, intolerance, and downright insanity of religious "enthusiasts" was the choice occupation of more than a few wits.¹ Satirical attacks on the hypocrisy and gullibility of religious practitioners were matched by attacks on religious doctrines and the churchmen who professed them. The Virgin Birth, Transubstantiation, the Trinity, and Miracles were all grist to the satirists' various mills.

One could object that unmasking religious hypocrisy was hardly novel since it was a stock theme in both classical and medieval literature. My argument in this essay is that religious hypocrisy took on a wholly new dimension in the early modern period because it was simply one of the many forms of deception and credulity recognized, deplored, castigated, satirized, and parodied at the time. As Jack Lynch has pointed out, a great many eighteenth-century Britons were

¹ Michael Heyd, "*Be Sober and Reasonable:*" *The Critique of Enthusiasm in the Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries*. Brill's Studies in Intellectual History, 63 (Leiden, Cologne, et al.: E. J. Brill, 1995).

convinced that their age was unprecedented in terms of deception, which explains why adjectives like “authentic,” “genuine,” and “real” proliferated in book titles.²

The British were not alone, however, in their obsession with distinguishing fact from fiction and reality from illusion. Across the continent Europeans were consumed by the task of uncovering frauds, hoaxes, and forgeries, and exposing impostors became a major task of writers, antiquarians, literary critics, artists, politicians, theologians, natural philosophers, lawyers, and judges. What made the issue of ferreting out deception so pressing at this particular juncture were the enormous cultural shifts that occurred during the early modern period. Trade, travel, and exploration, together with the wars of religion precipitated by the Protestant Reformation and the startling new developments in the natural sciences, psychology, and epistemology, shattered the teleologically and hierarchically ordered Aristotelian-Ptolemaic cosmos. With the demise of this world view went the framework that had existed for some two thousand years allowing Europeans to understand the world, their place in it, their purpose and identity. Although many people remained blissfully ignorant of these developments, it would not be an exaggeration to say they had catastrophic, if not tragic, effects. However disastrous the Fall and the expulsion from the Garden of Eden was in the minds of believing Christians, the fall from the pre-Copernican into the post-Copernican universe was even more traumatic; for it was no longer simply a matter of the expulsion of sinful humans with diminished capabilities into a less than perfect world, but the emergence of novel and unsettling questions about the nature and reality of this world and the humans who inhabit it.³

Fast on the heels of these existential conundrums came the horrifying possibility that not only was knowledge unattainable in any absolute form but the very existence of a stable, substantial, and reliable knowledge had become problematic. That these issues, which struck at the very heart of a human being's understanding of himself and the world, became a subject of humor, at least for some people, is entirely understandable; for jokes by their very nature can have a subversive, corrosive effect on existing social and political structures and the ideology that supports them. Consequently, they can reveal important cracks in established

² Jack Lynch, *Deception and Detection in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Aldershot, England, and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008), 2.

³ Anthony Grafton, “The Importance of Being Printed,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 11 (1980/1981): 265–86; id., with April Shelford and Nancy Siraisi, *New Worlds, Ancient Texts: The Power of Tradition and the Shock of Discovery* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992); Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change. Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early-Modern Europe* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979); eadem, *The Printing Revolution in Early-Modern Europe* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Anthony Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man: The American Indian and the Origins of Comparative Ethnology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Richard H. Popkin, *The History of Scepticism: From Savonarola to Bayle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

patterns of thought and activity and appear whenever the status quo is threatened. Drawing on Bergson's and Freud's analysis of jokes, Mary Douglas stresses this point by remarking that jokes are primarily an attack on control; they confront something organized and prescribed with something vital and energetic, be it Bergson's *élan vital* or Freud's *libido*:

The joke merely affords opportunity for realizing that an accepted pattern has no necessity. Its excitement lies in the suggestion that any particular ordering of experience may be arbitrary and subjective. It is frivolous in that it produces no real alternative, only an exhilarating sense of freedom from form in general.⁴

As we shall see, Douglas underestimates the effects jokes can and do have. Far from being frivolous and offering no alternatives, the jokes described in this essay transformed the mental landscape of many eighteenth-century Europeans, opening up fresh perspectives on what it meant to be human in a world that was becoming increasing urban, industrial, and, in a word, modern. The comic possibilities that deception and credulity offered in the long eighteenth century lay bare the unsettling issues from which this humor emerged, issues involving the breakdown of established religious, social, and scientific truths and the imposition of new ideas and practices that deeply disturbed some people while delighting others.

In tackling this daunting subject there is no better place to start than with Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, whose popularity and influence outside of Spain was perhaps even greater than in Spain itself. As in so many instances, art anticipated many of the issues that were to consume philosophers and writers long after Cervantes's death. At the center of his comedy is the polarization of the ideal and the ordinary, the imagination and reality, and this polarity is embodied in the very physiques of two main characters: Don Quixote's emaciated self, his elevated, chivalric discourse, and his idealistic actions stand in stark contrast to Sancho's short, fat, plebian body and his realistic responses to his master's delusions. As Sancho says, "the only thing that is real . . . is what we have before our eyes."⁵ But, as we shall see, Sancho was wrong: seeing ceased to be believing in the long eighteenth century, and Sancho's down-to-earth approach to reality did not answer the vexing questions raised by philosophers and scientists about how and what we know and who knows it.

Quixote's foray against the windmills and his attack on the puppet show are two of the most famous episodes involving the confusion of fact with fiction and delusion with reality. Equally unsettling is the issue of Don Quixote's identity, not

⁴ Mary Douglas, "Jokes," *Implicit Meanings: Selected Essays in Anthropology*. 2nd edition (1966; London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 146–64; here 150–51.

⁵ Cited in Ronald Paulson, *Don Quixote in England: The Aesthetics of Laughter* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 6.

to mention the identities of other characters in the novel. In chapter 12, for example, Quixote meets the Knight of the Wood, who is really the false Knight of the Mirrors, and he informs Don Quixote that he has defeated a certain Don Quixote in battle. This uncertainty about who is the real and who the pseudo Don Quixote complicates the already existing confusion between Don Quixote de la Mancha and his previous self, Alonso Quijano the Good. Not only is the “real” identity of Don Quixote made doubtful, but the reader finds him/herself questioning the identity and veracity of the author of the text. Who exactly is this Cid Hamete Benegeli, who claims to have written the novel to disabuse readers of chivalric nonsense? How reliable is he as a narrator? And what about the reliability of the text itself? By raising the issue of the authority and authenticity of author as well as text, Cervantes implicitly questions the reliability of all authors and all texts, and this included Scriptural texts, an issue of great importance and contention during the long eighteenth century. For it was during this period that the so-called “Battle between the Ancients and the Moderns” occurred, a battle in which the scholarly “moderns” poured over supposedly ancient texts from the Bible to Ossian, impugning their authorship and authenticity.⁶

Ronald Paulson has demonstrated the profound influence Cervantes had on English comic literature in the eighteenth century. Fielding, Swift, Addison, and Sterne were among the most famous of a host of authors intrigued by Don Quixote, and they modeled some of their own inimitable characters on that fabulous knight errant.⁷ Fielding, for example, announced on the title page of his novel *Joseph Andrews* that it was “written in Imitation of the Manner of Cervantes.” Given this assertion, when Parson Andrews throws his copy of Aeschylus into the fire, it is hard not to think of Don Quixote relegating his romances to the flames and, by analogy, to think of what Deists and free thinkers were doing less literally but equally effectively to scriptural texts. Sterne’s inimitable Walter Shandy is another Quixote-like figure in his quest to propagate and rear the perfect male specimen, and the various hobby-horses that the novel’s other characters metaphorically ride represent fixations no less delusional than Don Quixote’s.

⁶ Ian Haywood, *Faking It: Art and the Politics of Forgery* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1987); idem, *The Making of History: A Study of the Literary Forgeries of James Macpherson and Thomas Chatterton in Relation to Eighteenth-Century Ideas of History and Fiction* (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1986). Disrupting the conventions of narrative order and questioning the veracity and even the identity of narrators and editors occurs in a number of eighteenth-century novels. For example, Henry Mackenzie’s *The Man of Feeling* begins with chapter XI and contains missing chapters, editorial insertions, and ellipses, all of which bring into question the reliability of the text. Henry Mackenzie, *The Man of Feeling*, ed. Brian Vickers. Oxford World’s Classics (1771; Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

⁷ There was even a novel written by Charlotte Lennox entitled *The Female Quixote, or the Adventures of Arabella* [1752], ed. Amanda Gilroy and Wil Verhoeven (London: Penguin, 2006).

Cervantes's hero came to eighteenth-century English and continental authors through the prism of seventeenth-century natural philosophy, epistemology, and psychology, which added further elements of uncertainty to the already tortured issue of distinguishing truth from falsehood and reality from illusion. Neither Descartes's *cogito ergo sum* nor Locke's *Essay of Human Understanding* solved the problems raised by Cervantes; for if mind and matter had nothing whatsoever in common, as Descartes seemed to contend, and if the mind was a *tabula rasa* with no inherent stock of innate ideas, as Locke maintained, how could human beings know anything? And as much as Newton believed he had saved the universe for God, his physics merely compounded the problem of how we know and what we know. By claiming that the only things that truly existed are impenetrable bits of matter in motion, it became clear that the human senses provided a wholly inaccurate picture of the way things really are. Color, touch, taste, and smell—all the things that make life worthwhile or, at least, interesting—are simply secondary qualities, the products of our senses and minds with no relation to the actual world. Consequently, reality and the human perception of this reality are incommensurable. The potential for skepticism resulting from such ideas is obvious, for if our knowledge of external reality comes solely by way of our senses, how can individuals be sure that they experience the same world as everyone else or, indeed, that there even is an external world?

A further source of confusion came from the astonishing amount of new information that bombarded European psyches as a result of trade, travel, and exploration.⁸ When Locke's described the mind as a *tabula rasa*, his specific target was the Platonic notion of innate ideas. But even before he dismissed these as fictions, their existence had become problematic. How exactly could one identify the innate ideas that supposedly characterized the thinking of all people at all times and in all places given the enormous proliferation of travel literature stressing the decidedly exotic and uncommon ideas of newly discovered peoples around the globe? As Swift wrote wittily in a letter to Pope, he had met a bishop who "hardly believed a word" of Gulliver's Travels.⁹ Swift's remark seems very funny to us, but it was probably not quite so funny to many of his contemporaries, who were inundated by travel narratives describing strange lands inhabited by strange humans and a host of other creatures not a whit more or less improbable than the Yahoos and Hounhymns of Swift's imagination. In this regard it must be remembered that the Garden of Eden still appeared regularly on maps in the early modern period, often alongside Prester John's Kingdom. The unusual things reportedly seen in both places further confused readers as to what was true or

⁸ Stephen J. Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991). See also note 3.

⁹ Swift to Pope, November 27, 1726. *The Correspondence of Jonathan Swift*, ed. Harold William, 5 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963–1965), 3:189.

false. One of the most interesting denizens of the Garden of Eden was the so-called "vegetable lamb" (Figures 1 & 2). The existence of this creature in the blissful vegetarian environment of Eden was perhaps "over determined" in the mind of its carnivorous English inventor. For here we see a woolly lamb growing on a stalk, a vegetable for all apparent purposes. If lambs could or actually had at some point grown on stalks, who could be sure about what else might be out there to upset the apple cart of established wisdom?

As we listen to news reports on the radio or television, we hardly think about what the word "news" really means. The term first came into common usage in the sixteenth century and referred to the new information flooding Europe as a result of humanistic scholarship, the voyages of discovery, the conquest of the New World, and the proliferation of printed texts.¹⁰ While for some people this barrage of information was stimulating and exciting, others found it disconcerting. Stephen Greenblatt has captured the profound psychological effect the New World had on Old World psyches. In the face of so much novelty, the ancient maxim *Nil admirari* no longer made sense. As he says,

in the presence of the New World the classical model of mature, balanced detachment seemed at once inappropriate and impossible. Columbus's voyage initiated a century of intense wonder . . . European culture experienced something like the "startle reflex" one can observe in infants: eyes widened, arms outstretched, breathing stilled, the whole body momentarily convoluted . . . The expression of wonder stands for all that cannot be understood, that can scarcely be believed.¹¹

Greenblatt illustrates this point by referring to Jean de Léry (1536–1613), a French Huguenot pastor, whose *History of a Voyage to the Land of Brazil* (1578). Léry wonders how his readers can be made to "believe what can only be seen two thousand leagues from where they live; things never known (much less written about) by the Ancients; things so marvelous that experience itself can scarcely engrave them on the understanding even of those who have in fact seen them?"¹² The answer was that to believe in the reality of such marvels entailed accepting the reliability of the witnesses who described them. Interestingly enough, this was precisely the same answer that Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola (1470–1533) and other demonologists gave to those who doubted the reliability of accounts of

¹⁰ William Eamon notes how printers profited from advertizing their books as "new" in *Science and the Secrets of Nature: Books of Secrets in Medieval and Early-Modern Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 108. Lynn Thorndike comments on the number of seventeenth-century scientific books with *novus* or "unheard-of" in "Newness and Craving for Novelty in Seventeenth-Century Science and Medicine," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 12 (1952): 584–98.

¹¹ Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions*, 14, 20. Some scholars argue in opposition to Greenblatt that these discoveries had little impact on the Old World. Cf. J. H. Elliott, *The Old World and the New* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970).

¹² Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions*, 21.

witchcraft throughout the early modern period.¹³ But to believe L  ry involved a far more radical reevaluation of traditional knowledge than that demanded by Pico. Pico, in essence, simply told his readers to believe traditional church teachings about the existence of demonic spirits and witches. L  ry, on the other hand, asked his readers to reject traditional ideas, categories, and philosophical and scientific schemes and accept things strange and unknown.

In her book *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth-Century*, Svetlana Alpers has provided a wealth of examples to show that in the early modern period artists and natural philosophers were preoccupied with the same issue of how to distinguish between fact and fiction, reality and imagination. While both groups gave lip-service to the idea that art and science simply hold up a mirror to reality, their own activities and statements reveal deep-seated doubts. Robert Hooke's (1635–1703) denigration of his own great talents as a draughtsman promoted the idea that the scientist merely records what is there for all to see. As Hooke says of the art of scientific illustration:

there is not so much requir'd towards it, any strength of Imagination, or exactness of Method, or depth of Contemplation (though the addition of these, where they can be had, must needs produce a much more perfect composure) as a Sincere Hand, and a faithful Eye, to examine, and to record, the things themselves as they appear.¹⁴

In his "Ode to the Royal Society" (1667), published in Thomas Sprat's history of the institution, Abraham Crowley made the same claim that the job of scientists was simply to reveal "the real object":

Who to the life an exact Piece would make,
Must not from others work a Copy take;
... No, he before his sight must place
The natural and Living Face:
The real object must command
Each judgment of his Eye, and Motion of his Hand.¹⁵

The assumption that one could produce objective images of things as they really are not only informed the work of scientific illustrators and poets but was axiomatic for educators as well. Comenius's *Orbus Pictus* (1658) provides a clear example, for in this book he presents what he believes to be the real image of a real thing and then attaches a word to it. John Evelyn praised the book because it showed that a "picture is a kind of *universal language*."¹⁶ But Comenius was aware

¹³ Walter Stephens, *Demon Lovers: Witchcraft, Sex, and the Crisis of Belief* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 235.

¹⁴ Hooke, *Micrographia* (1664), preface; cited in Svetlana Alpers, *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth-Century* (London: John Murray, 1983), 73.

¹⁵ Cited in Alpers, *The Art of Describing*, 79.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

that images never really provide an objective, true vision of reality. For while he subscribes to the view that “seeing is believing,” he does not think that all ways of seeing are equally believable. As he says in his *The Great Didactic* (1641):

Whoever has once seen a dissection of the human body will understand and remember the relative position of its parts with far greater certainty than if he had read the most exhaustive treatises on anatomy, but have never actually seen a dissection performed. Hence the saying, “seeing is believing

We will speak of the mode in which objects must be presented to the senses, if the impression is to be distinct If the object is to be clearly seen it is necessary: 1) that it be placed before the eyes; 2) not far off, but at a reasonable distance; 3) not on one side, but straight before the eyes; 4) and so that the front of the object be not turned away from but directed towards, the observer; 5) that the eyes first take in the object as a whole; 6) and then proceed to distinguish the parts; 7) inspecting these in order from the beginning to the end; 8) that attention be paid to each and every part; 9) until they are all grasped by means of their essential attributes. If these requisites be properly observed, vision takes place, successfully; but if one be neglected its success is only partial.¹⁷

The “requisites” stipulated by Comenius significantly undermine the assumption that one could ever produce an entirely accurate image of anything and thus ever reveal its essential nature. Many others were aware of the deceptive nature of images and fully cognizant of how conditional the sense of sight is. Alpers attributes Anton van Leeuwenhoek’s (1667–1723) fascination with insect and animal eyes to precisely this realization and attributes the same awareness of the arbitrary nature of sight to painters:

Leeuwenhoek was possessed by a fascination with the eyes of insects and animals. He looked not only at them but through them. In describing what animal or insect eyes see, he repeatedly calls attention to the fact that the world is known not through being visible, but through the particular instruments that mediate what is seen. Size, for example, is relative and dependent on the seer When Paulus Potter or Aelbert Cuyp juxtaposes a bull or a looming cow against a tower made tiny by its distance, he similarly acknowledges the conditions of sight.¹⁸

Catherine Wilson suggests that one of the reasons microscopes were not used by scientists as much as one might expect was because scientists themselves were dismayed by the way such instruments called into question the human sense of sight.¹⁹ The idea that man was the measure of all things and that his senses equipped him adequately to investigate and comprehend the world—a basic

¹⁷ Alpers, *The Art of Describing*, 95.

¹⁸ Ibid., 83–84.

¹⁹ Catherine Wilson, *The Invisible World: Early-Modern Philosophy and the Invention of the Microscope* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995).

premise of Aristotelian science—was undermined by the discovery of the telescope and microscope. Thus the correspondence between images and reality described by Alpers as a fundamental postulate of Dutch art and science in the seventeenth century dissolves by the end of the period into a disconcerting awareness of relativism and uncertainty.

Although a number of historians have challenged the idea that either the Renaissance (however that may be defined) or the seventeenth century marked a decisive break with the past, especially in terms of science, recent historical studies have gone back to emphasizing the epistemological rupture that occurred in the early modern period, describing it in terms of the “decontextualization” or “desacrilization” of the world. Although it is virtually impossible to say when precisely this change occurred, the concepts of “decontextualization” and “desacrilization” offer suggestive insights into precisely how the modern secular and scientifically oriented world came into being and how crucial the issues of deception and credulity were in this process.

Linguistic historians were the first to use the term “decontextualization” to indicate what happens when an oral culture becomes literate. In *The Domestication of the Savage Mind*, for example, Jack Goody argues that words are objectified in a literary culture and separated from the things they describe.²⁰ In the same way that words are decontextualized from the things they represent, so were things decontextualized from each other. The passion for collecting, labeling, and illustrating specimens and placing them in curiosity cabinets, which began in the late Renaissance continuing in full force up to modern times, was part of this emphasis on the individual over the whole, the detail at the expense of the overall picture. In this respect decontextualization is a key aspect of the transition from what Michel Foucault has described as an “episteme of resemblance” to one of analysis and order.

Paracelsus’s (1493–1541) doctrine of “signatures” provides an apt example of Foucault’s “episteme of resemblance.” For Paracelsus, understanding what a thing is entails knowing what it resembles and locating it within the hierarchy of created substances descending from disembodied spirits to lowly pebbles. Paracelsus’s pharmacopoeia was largely based on resemblance: anconite is good for the eyes because the seeds look like eyes; walnut meat cures head ailments.²¹ While this way of looking at the world is foreign to us, it explains why earlier naturalists included in their descriptions of flora and fauna information we deem extraneous

²⁰ Jack Goody, *The Domestication of the Savage Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 46: “. . . words assume a different relationship to action and to object when they are on paper than when they are spoken. They are no longer bound up directly with “reality”; the written word becomes a separate “thing,” abstracted to some extent from the flow of speech, shedding its close entailment with action, with power over matter.”

²¹ These examples come from the Paracelsian Oswald Croll and are cited in Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), 27.

and useless. When Conrad Gesner (1516–1565) describes a peacock, for example, he had far more in mind than its physical characteristics. Its anatomy was only one aspect and, in Gesner's view, a very small aspect of the peacock's essential nature. A full understanding of that required a look at the further disciplines of etymology, mythology, and history. William Ashworth describes Gesner's approach as typical of what he calls an "emblematic world view," in which everything is seen as a sign or symbol of something else.²²

In Gesner's universe each existing thing was a letter or word in the great "Book of Nature" written by God. In the dedicatory epistle, Gesner claims that his history of animals is especially valuable because it reveals, "that chronicle which was made by God himselfe, every living beast being a word, every kind being a sentence, and all of them together a large history, containing admirable knowledge and learning, which was, which is, which shall continue (if not forever) yet to the world's end."²³

During the early-modern period the emblematic world view was replaced by a new way of seeing in which individual elements are taken out of context, isolated and analyzed, not in terms of their similarities with other existing things but in terms of their differences. Where the individual had previously only been comprehensible as a part of the whole, the part now becomes greater than the whole in the sense that there no longer was a whole. The grand schemes of encyclopedic knowledge characterizing Gesner's work (along with that of many others) based on the resemblances and correspondences binding every aspect of the physical world into an organic, hierarchical unity collapsed under the weight of what has been described as the "information explosion." As Ashworth says, "Anteaters and sloths do not appear in Erasmus or Alciator or Piero Valeriano; they are missing from all the writings of antiquity. They come into the Old World naked, without emblematic significance."²⁴ In 1623 the herbalist Bauhin listed six

²² William B. Ashworth, Jr., "Natural History and the Emblematic World View," *Reappraisals of the Scientific Revolution*, ed. David C. Lindberg and Robert S. Westman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 303–32; here 312: "The emblematic world view is, in my opinion, the single most important factor in determining late Renaissance attitudes towards the natural world. . . . The essence of this view is the belief that every kind of thing in the cosmos has myriad hidden meanings and that knowledge consists of an attempt to comprehend as many of them as possible. To know the peacock, as Gesner wanted to know it, one must know not only what the peacock looks like but what its name means, in every language; what kind of proverbial associations it has; what it symbolizes to both pagans and Christians; what other animals it has sympathies or affinities with; and any other possible connection it might have with stars, plants, minerals, numbers, coins, or whatever. Gesner included all this, not because he was uncritical or obtuse, but because knowledge of the peacock was incomplete without it. The notion that the peacock should be studied in isolation from the rest of the universe, and that inquiry should be limited to anatomy, physiology, and physical description, was a notion completely foreign to Renaissance thought."

²³ *Ibid.*, 316.

²⁴ Ashworth, "Natural History and the Emblematic World View," 318.

thousand terminal taxa; but by 1676 John Ray had expanded the list to eighteen thousand, and no one stopped counting after that.²⁵

As Alpers shows, fragmentization becomes a part of seventeenth-century art: "Fragments are prized No need is felt to pull together, assemble, or in some way resolve individual views into a unified sense of a whole."²⁶ She cites the rage for "peep-boxes" and still-life paintings of objects from multiple perspectives as an indication of this fascination with multiple and conflicting view-points:

The peep-box, for example, was a construction that also offered various views adding up to make a single world, as do the frequent mirrors or mirroring surfaces; still life obsessively topple containers and peel lemons, or cut pies or open watches to expose multiple aspects to view. One could go on. No single view dominates in the interest of this additive way of piecing together the world.²⁷

The peep-box is a perfect image for what had occurred by the end of the seventeenth century. In the same way that the peep-box imposed order on a chaos of conflicting views by artificially establishing the viewer's vantage point, so was order increasingly imposed on recalcitrant humanity from the exclusive vantage point of absolutist monarchs, professionals, and experts. The concept of an organic unity linking individuals to other human beings and to the world at large collapsed in the early modern period. The image of individuals as separate "monads" mirroring other "monads" yet at the same time isolated and locked in their own solipsistic worlds seems to offer the clearest idea of just how profound the change in outlook was. One might go even further and say that the early modern period was the first time in history that allowed adventurous individuals ample opportunity to remake themselves, a possibility encouraged by the anonymity of urban living. It is therefore no coincidence that Ovid's *Metamorphosis* was so popular during the period or that Circe and Medea become stock characters in literature and drama, for both women were experts in the art of transformation.²⁸

An awareness of the instability of individual identity and the tremendous fear this engendered in many individuals was one of the motivating factors in the Puritans' attack on the theater and their profound distrust of the imagination.²⁹ But

²⁵ On the issue of taxonomy and the proliferation of *taxa*, see Margaret M. Slaughter, *Universal Language and Scientific Taxonomy in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

²⁶ Alpers, *The Art of Describing*, 85.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 163.

²⁸ Paula Findlen, "Jokes of Nature and Jokes of Knowledge: The Playfulness of Scientific Discourse in Early-Modern Europe," *Renaissance Quarterly* 43 (1990): 292–331; here 310: "Ovid held a particularly important place in all aspects of Renaissance thought."

²⁹ For general accounts of this whole issue see Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1980); Lorraine Daston and Katherine Parks, "Hermaphrodites in Renaissance France," *Critical Matrix* 1 (1985). On the question of Puritan

it was also a liberating factor for all those who relished the chance to create new identities and engage in new as well as old forms of fraud and deception which proliferated at the time.

One of the most spectacular of the innumerable cases of fraud and deception described in the popular press occurred in 1726 and involved a twenty-five year old maidservant by the name of Mary Toft, who claimed to have given birth to 16 rabbits. Mary was apparently obsessed with rabbits. While pregnant she had been observed admiring rabbits in the local market and chasing rabbits from her garden, and she had developed an unnatural craving for roast rabbit. Her obsession gave support to the prevailing theory that fetuses could be affected by strong impressions made on the mother. In this case, strong rabbit impressions transformed Mary's growing fetus into fuzzy bunnies. Mary's labor was attended by the man-midwife John Howard, who was so impressed by the event that he wrote to both Nathanael St. Andre, surgeon-anatomist to King George I, and the eminent obstetrician Sir Richard Manningham to elicit their opinions about such an unusual birth. The story came to the attention of the press and caused a sensation as pamphlets and tracts for and against the truth of Mary's extraordinary experience proliferated. William Hogarth had a field day with Mary Toft and used her story to satirize religious and scientific superstitions of the day. His engraving, titled "Cunicularii," is not only a satirical take on Mary's claims, but a burlesque on the notion of the Virgin Birth, an aspect of Marian devotion that had been encouraged by the Council of Trent (figure 3). Playing on the similarity of the word for rabbit, "cuniculus," and the word for vulva, "cunnus," Hogarth has one of the three doctors witnessing the scene exclaim, "A great birth." As Ronald Paulson astutely points out, the composition resembles traditional scenes of the three wise men bearing gifts to the Christ child with Mary Toft standing in for the Virgin Mary and the rabbits for Jesus.³⁰

Hogarth's satirical attack on Mariolatry was not restricted to this engraving. Paulson makes a convincing case for interpreting Hogarth's "Harlot's Progress" as an even more direct assault on Catholic beliefs about Mary; for in this series of engravings we see one M. Hackabout, another stand-in for the Virgin, in scenes reminiscent of the annunciation, the visitation, the flagellation and the last supper. In these illustrations Hogarth's Mary plays the part of both the Virgin and her crucified son.³¹ Hogarth's satirical attack on another Catholic doctrine, Transubstantiation, appears in several other illustrations including the following one depicting what might be described as "a Eucharist making machine" (Figure

attitudes to the theater see Laura Levine, "Men in Women's Clothing: Anti-Theatricality and Effeminization from 1579-1642," *Criticism* 28 (Spring 1986): 121-43.

³⁰ Ronald Paulson, *Hogarth's Harlot: Sacred Parody in Enlightenment England* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 75-76.

³¹ *Ibid.*, passim.

4). Here we see the Virgin Mary dropping the Christ Child into a hopper while host wafers drop out of the other end into the hands of a priest who administers the sacrament to a kneeling believer.

In "O the Roast Beef of England" (1749) Hogarth continues to satirize Catholicism (Figure 5). In the distance, through a gate clearly modeled on earlier depictions of the mouth of hell, Mass is celebrated by priests, while in the foreground a fat cleric snacks on a huge side of roast beef carried by an emaciated Frenchman into a local English tavern. In the left foreground, fishmongers worship an apparent face on a ray fish, a fish being, of course, a symbol for Christ. So much for the miracles and superstitions of the Catholic Church! One might well ask how Hogarth got away with all this. First of all, he was in Anglican England, but even there blasphemy was still a crime punishable by imprisonment and even execution. Interestingly enough, however, it was only punishable in written or spoken form, a lacuna in the law that worked to Hogarth's advantage.

Swift was a major influence on Hogarth, but the influence was reciprocated. As Swift wrote in a bit of doggerel, "How I want thee, humourous *Hogart*? / Thou I hear, a pleasant Rogue art; / Were but you and I acquainted, / Every Monster should be painted . . ."³² Swift was as critical of Catholicism as Hogarth. In the *Tale of the Tub* Peter, who represents Roman Catholicism, declares to his brothers Martin and Jack, stand-ins for Luther and Calvin, that brown bread is a shoulder of mutton. Unfortunately, all they can see, smell, and taste is a crust of bread. When one of the brothers objects to Peter's allegorical interpretation of "silver Fringe" as "Broomstick," Peter castigates him as "one that spoke irreverently of a Mystery, which . . . ought not to be over-curiously pryed into, or nicely reasoned upon."³³ Swift targets the doctrine of Transubstantiation again in *Gulliver's Travels*, when he explains to his Houyhnhmn "Master" that one of the reasons why the British went to war with France was over the question of "whether Flesh be Bread, or Bread be Flesh; Whether the juice of a certain Berry be Blood or Wine."³⁴ Swift's "Meditations on a Broomstick" illustrates his utter rejection of the kind of fatuous optimism he saw all around him, especially when it came to religious theodicies attempting to explain away the evil, pain, and suffering that was such a prevalent part of every-day life. As a young man, Swift had been secretary to Sir William Temple (1628–1699) and while in his employ had chanced to read Robert Boyle's *Occasional Reflections upon Several Subjects* (1665). These reflections dealt with such mundane subjects as house cleaning and were intended to illustrate man's

³² Jonathan Swift, "A Character, Panegyric, and Description of the Legion Club." Cited in Carole Fabricant, *Swift's Landscape* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), 14.

³³ Swift, "A Tale of a Tub," *Jonathan Swift Major Works*, ed. Angus Ross and David Woolley. Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), Sect. II, 102–03.

³⁴ Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*, ch. 5.

relationship to God with the express purpose of promoting introspection and moral improvement. Swift would have none of Boyle's bromides. His broomstick meditations ridiculed such simple and saccharine approaches to man's relationship with God.

Swift's religious satire was aimed at both Catholics and Deists, though not Anglicans. The problem was, however, that once religion became a target of satire, there was no way to insure that the target would not keep moving. Bishop Tillotson had warned about precisely this in his essay "The Folly of Scoffing at Religion": There he observes that "Nothing is so easy as to take particular phrases and expressions out of the best Book in the world and to abuse them by forcing an odd and ridiculous sense upon them." William Wotton excoriated Swift's *Tale of a Tub* because it opened the door to jocular attacks on all aspects of religion, not just the extremes singled out by Swift. It was, he claimed, "of so irreligious a nature," and "so crude a Banter upon all that is esteemed as Sacred among all Sects and Religions among Men" that "[i]n a word, God and Religious Truth and Moral Honesty, Learning and Industry are made a May-Game, and the Most Serious Things in the world are described as so many Scenes in a *Tale of a Tub*."³⁵

Tillotson and Wotton were right. But attacking the attackers of religion did little to stem the suspicion and skepticism that greeted claims to the supernatural, whether in the form of miracles, apparitions, visions, or prophecies. George Colman (1762–1836) took aim at a variety of supernatural events that had been reported in the press—Mary Toft was included in his list—when he wrote "The Ghost's Catechism," attributing it to Reverend Mr. Moor (or Moore), who had been involved in the Cock Lane Ghost imposture.

"I Believe, in signs, omens, tokens, dreams, visions, spirits, ghosts, specters, and apparitions.

"And in Mary Tofts, who conceived and was brought to bed of a couple of rabbits.

"And in Elizabeth Canning, who lived a whole month without performing any usual offices of nature, on six crusts of dry bread and half a jug of water.

"And in A[rchibald] B[owe]r who made his escape from the Inq[uisitio]n at M[a]c[e]r[a]ta.

"And in all the miracles of the Holy Roman Catholic Church.

"I believe in fairies; I believe in witches; I believe in hobgoblins; I believe in the shrieking woman; I believe in the death-watch; I believe in the death-howl; I believe in raw-head-and-bloody-bones; I believe in all stories, tales, legends, &c. &c. &c. &c. . . ."³⁶

From these various examples it should be clear that separating fact from fiction exercised the wit of a great many satirists during the long eighteenth century. But at the same time that deciding what counted as accurate and legitimate knowledge

³⁵ Cited in Paulson, *Don Quixote*, 126–27.

³⁶ Cited in Lynch, *Deception and Detection in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, 39.

became a problem, so too did determining how an individual could know anything, even such a basic thing as himself. The ideal of a stable self disintegrated during the eighteenth century. No less a Figure than David Hume described the "self" as "a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which . . . are in perpetual flux and movement."³⁷ The fragmentary, inconsistent nature of an individual's personality became a real dilemma during the long eighteenth century with the emergence of what has been described as "the enterprise society," which allowed individuals an increasing role in shaping their status and identities. Such a seemingly harmless activity as reading novels encouraged an empathetic understanding of other people's circumstances and situations. These kinds of empathetic connections were further encouraged in many of the reading circles that developed as the middle class grew and literacy increased. In some of these groups participants were required to come as someone else and remain in character throughout the evening, whether that character was fictional or real.³⁸ But even fictional characters proved difficult to "read" correctly. For example, are the feelings of Harley, the protagonist in *The Man of Feeling*, genuine or counterfeit? If he is so easily fooled into thinking a footman he meets is really a gentleman and a gambler a kindly old man, what can we, the reader, think of him? Are his extravagant sympathies for the poor and downtrodden sincere or feigned?

The issue of identity and selfhood became a matter of great concern in a period known for its extravagant and popular masques and masquerades. Terry Castle goes so far as to claim that "eighteenth-century culture as a whole might . . . be termed, without exaggeration, a culture of travesty" and that eighteenth-century English society was . . . a world of masqueraders and artificers, self alienation and phantasmogoria," a view seconded by many living at the time.³⁹ In his *Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men* (1743) Henry Fielding described the world as "a vast Masquerade" and claimed that the "great part [of people] appear disguised under false visors and Habits."⁴⁰ Goldsmith lamented the fact that "the world's a masquerade" and pointed a finger at his readers by referring to "the masquers," as "you, you, you."⁴¹ Describing the corruption that accompanied wealth, the great and stern moralist Samuel Johnson castigated the rich and powerful, who "live in

³⁷ *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. Lewis A. Sleby-Bigge, 2nd. ed., rev. Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 252 [Book II, Part iv, sec. vi].

³⁸ Jerome Seigel, *The Idea of the Self: Thought and Experience in Western Europe since the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 351.

³⁹ Terry Castle, "The Culture of Travesty: Sexuality and Masquerade in Eighteenth-Century England," *British Literature, 1640–1789: A Critical Reader*, ed. Robert Demaria, Jr. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1999), 251–70; here 251. See also her book *The Female Thermometer: Eighteenth-Century Culture and the Invention of the Uncanny* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

⁴⁰ Cited in Castle, "The Culture of Travesty: Sexuality and Masquerade in Eighteenth-Century England," 251.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

perpetual masquerade, in which all about them weare borrowed characters."⁴² The theater provided an apt example of how easy it was to slip from one part to another. In Beaumarchais's *The Marriage of Figaro* (1784), the protagonist soliloquizes about the instability of his own self:

. . . nor do I know who this I may be with which *I* am so concerned—it's first a shapeless collection of unknown parts, then a helpless puny thing, then a lively little animal, then a young man thirsting for pleasure, with a full capacity to enjoy and ready to sue any shifts to live—master here and valet there, at the whim of fortune; ambitious from vanity, industrious from need—and lazy . . . with delight! An orator in tight spots, a poet for relaxation, a musician from time to time, a lover in hot fits: I have seen everything, done everything, worn out everything.⁴³

Masquerading became a prominent activity in public spaces and public entertainments, and Samuel Richardson excoriated the fact that women took special pleasure in them: "The sex is generally running into licentiousness," he complains, ". . . when Ranelaghs, Vauxhalls, Marleybones, assemblies . . . and a rabble of such-like amusements carry them out of all domestic duty and usefulness into infinite riot and expense."⁴⁴ Richardson had a point: masques and masquerades did allow women to approach strangers, initiate conversations, speak coarsely, and even touch and embrace those to whom they had not been introduced. In short, masquerades allowed women to violate all the norms associated with female decorum. This was precisely why Harriette Wilson relished masquerades:

it is delightful to me to be able to wander about in a crowd, making my observations, and conversing with whomsoever I please, without being liable to be stared at or remarked upon, and to speak to whom I please, and run away from them the moment I discover their stupidity.⁴⁵

Some examples of what masqueraders actually got up to may even raise some sophisticated contemporary eyebrows. Take, for example, this picture of "Miss Chudley in the Actual Dress as she appear'd in ye character of Iphigenia at ye Jubilee Ball or Masquerade at Ranelagh" in 1749 (Figure 6). According to a Mrs. Montague, who was present on this occasion, Miss Chudley appeared "so naked that the high priest might easily inspect the entrails of the victim."⁴⁷

⁴² Samuel Johnson, *The Rambler, The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson*, ed. Walter Jackson Bate and Albrecht B. Strauss, vols. 3–5 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953), 4:33.

⁴³ Brian Wilkie and James Hurt, ed. *Literature of the Western World, Volume II: Neoclassicism Through the Modern Period* (New York: Prentice Hall, 2000), Act V, 465–66.

⁴⁴ Letter to Lady Bradshaigh, 17 August 1752. Cited in Castle, "The Culture of Travesty: Sexuality and Masquerade in Eighteenth-Century England," 269, n. 25.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 261.

⁴⁷ Castle, "The Culture of Travesty: Sexuality and Masquerade in Eighteenth-Century England," 257.

Erotic stimulation was a definite feature of masques, and the possibilities for libidinal expression virtually limitless. Naughty nuns, licentious friars, and wayward priests were stock characters at masques, both actual and artistic. Henry Robert Morland's painting "The Fair Nun Unmasked" (1769) depicts a prostitute removing her mask and provocatively revealing the jeweled crucifix on her bare bosom. In 1770 a man attended one of Mrs. Cornelys's masquerades in Soho Square as Adam in a flesh-colored silk body stocking with "an apron of fig leaves worked in it, fitting the body to the utmost nicety." As the *Gentleman's Magazine* (March 1770) points out, this occasioned a certain "unavoidable indelicacy," and by doing so provides another example of how masquerades encouraged individuals to breach conventional rules of decorum.⁴⁸ Not only was etiquette ignored, but so too were class distinctions. In "On the Masquerades" (1727) Christopher Pitt stressed the fact that inferior classes mingled indiscriminately with and aped their betters:

Valets adorned with coronets appear,
Lacques of state and footmen with a star,
Sailors of quality with judges mix, —
And chimney-sweepers drive their coach-and six."⁴⁹

Not only were class distinctions obliterated at masquerades, but gender boundaries were crossed, and transvestites abounded. The *Gentleman's Magazine* (April 1776) described a gentleman at a masquerade in Richmond who "appeared in woman's clothes with a head-dress four feet high, composed of greens and garden stuff, and crowned with tufts of endive nicely blanched." In 1755 *The Connoisseur* described "one gentleman above six foot high, who came to the masquerade drest like a child in a white frock and leading-string, attended by another gentleman of a very low stature, who officiated as his 'nurse.'" One very important effect of these various disguises was to demonstrate that nature was not natural but a product of custom and convention. What many people considered "natural" in terms of gender and class was shown to be artificial and socially constructed. Thus, disguises, like jokes, paradoxically unmasked the arbitrary nature of social norms and conventions.

While masquerading was hardly new, eighteenth-century masquerades were. They differed from medieval and Renaissance carnivals, court masquerades, and even the masquerades of the Restoration period because they were large-scale commercial and public entertainments that were non-exclusive and urban. While relatively few people attended masquerades, they had a significant impact on the perceptions of the public at large because they were so frequently described in novels, poems, stories, newspapers, and in engravings like the following one by

⁴⁸ Ibid., 258.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 254.

Hogarth.⁵⁰ Here we see masqueraders beneath giant statues of Venus and Priapus with two “Lecherometers” at hand to gauge their sexual excitement. As we might expect, Hogarth neatly captures the sexual frisson at the heart of these transgressive entertainments. Like the criminal biographies that became such a popular form of eighteenth-century literature (just think of Gay’s “The Beggar’s Opera”), masquerades reflected the growing revolt against traditional values and social structures (Figure 7). As Richard Steele observed in *The Spectator* (no. 14), masqueraders dressed as what they “have a mind to be.”⁵¹ Masquerades provided access to new realms, be they sensual, sexual, ethical, or professional. Masquerade literature, and especially the diatribes written against masquerades, presented shocking tales of accidental incest, homosexuality, adultery—in other words, non-marital and non-procreative sexuality—highlighting previously unmentionable sexual desires and allowing individuals the pleasure of indulging in them.

The issue of identity penetrated through masks and clothes right to the heart of what it meant to be human. This problem lies at the core of much of the humor of the age. How do such seemingly disparate things as mind, body, and soul coexist and jointly form a person? Where indeed is the soul? The *Memoirs of Martinus Scriblerus*, anonymously written through the joint efforts of Pope, Arbuthnot, and Gay, but with contributions from Swift, attacks this problem with gusto. Martinus falls in love, but the object of his affections presents problems because “she” is possibly a “they,” and as a result marriage could conceivably involve bigamy or adultery. Let me explain: the object of Martinus’s affections in this satire was modeled on a real set of Siamese twins exhibited in London in 1708. What caused such a stir about these girls was the fact that they were joined at the buttocks and shared common genital and rectal orifices.⁵² As one can well imagine, this curious formation attracted the attention of scientists as well as a great many wits because it raised “abundance of questions in divinity, law, and physics,” as Swift wrote to a friend.⁵³ Questions poured into the *British Apollo*, which took pride in attempting to answer difficult questions, about whether the twins possessed one or two souls, whether they could marry, and whether marriage with one would involve incest with the other. These questions are taken up in Martinus’s *Memoirs* in the section

⁵⁰ Terry Castle, *Masquerade and Civilization: The Carnavalesque in Eighteenth-Century English Culture and Fiction* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986); Efrat Tseëlon, *Masquerade and Identities: Essays on Gender, Sexuality, and Marginality* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001).

⁵¹ Castle, “The Culture of Travesty: Sexuality and Masquerade in Eighteenth-Century England,” 252.

⁵² It was believed that this malformation occurred as a result of the mother seeing a pair of monstrous dogs joined with heads in different directions (Letter by William Burnett read to The Royal Society on May 12, 1708). See Charles Kerby-Miller, ed. *The Memoirs of the Extraordinary Life, Works, and Discoveries of Martinus Scriblerus* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

⁵³ June 10, 1709; Cited in *ibid.*, 295

describing the court case that supposedly followed his marriage to one of the twins. Here, various theories about the nature of a person are neatly summed up by Martin's lawyer, Mr. Penny-Feather, when he argues that personhood is determined by the existence and location of the soul and concludes with the claim that the soul is in the genitals.

Let us search Profane History, and we shall find Geryon with three heads, and Briareus with an hundred hands. Let us search Sacred History, and we meet with one of the sons of the giants with six fingers to each Hand, and six Toes to each foot; yet none ever accounted Geryon or Briareus more than one Person: and give us leave to say, the wife of the said Geryon would have had a good Action against any women who should have espous'd themselves to the two other heads of that Monarch. The Reason is plain; because each of these having but one simple . . . Member of Generation, could be look'd upon as but one single person . . . And as where there is but one Member of Generation, there is but one body, so there can be but one Soul; because the said organ of Generation is the Seat of the Soul; and consequently, where there is but one such Organ, there can be but one Soul. Let me here say, without Injury to truth, that no Philosopher, either of the past or present age, hath taken more pains to discover where the Soul keeps her residence, than . . . the learned Martinus Scriblerus: And after his most diligent enquiries and experiments, he hath been verily persuaded, that the Organ of Generation is the true and only Seat of the Soul.⁵⁴

In this passage we have come a long way from Descartes's pineal gland! As it suggests, the very existence of the soul had become the stuff of jokes, even mockery. While the humor is hilarious, the hilarity comes at the steep price of admitting that it is impossible to define the nature of human beings, a conclusion reached by other authors as well. Sterne has his hero Tristram Shandy muse about the limitations of human understanding:

We live amongst riddles and mysteries—the most obvious things, which come in our way, have dark sides, which the quickest sight cannot penetrate into; and even the clearest and most exalted understandings amongst us find ourselves puzzled and at a loss in almost every cranny of nature's works.⁵⁵

As Roy Porter points out, "Sterne writes not as a stern moralist but in the comic vein."⁵⁶

For some people living in the long eighteenth century the existential dilemmas of human existence had descended from heaven to earth to be greeted with laughter rather than thunder bolts from on high. The fact that we may not know exactly who or what we are and that we have only a slim grasp of reality had become a source of humorous satire. Problems that had previously belonged in the

⁵⁴ Ibid., 157-58.

⁵⁵ Roy Porter, *Flesh in the Age of Reason: The Modern Foundation of Body and Soul* (New York and London: W. W Norton & Company, 2003), 299.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 298.

religious sphere had slipped, at least for some adventurous spirits, into the realm of aesthetics. In his essay on the "Pleasures of the Imagination," Addison claims that fictions of the mind are not simply sources of error but of pleasure as well. As he says:

. . . our Souls are at present delightfully lost and bewildered in a pleasing Delusion, and we walk about like the Enchanted Hero of a Romance, who sees beautiful Castles, woods and meadows, and at the same time hears the warbling of Birds, and the purling of Streams; but upon the finishing of some secret spell, the fantastick Scene breaks up, and the disconsolate Knight finds himself in a barren Heath, or in a solitary Desert.⁵⁷

Each one of us is, in short, Don Quixote! All is not lost, however; as Addison goes on to say, "Indeed the Ideas and Colours are so pleasing and beautiful in the Imagination that it is possible the Soul will not be deprived of them"⁵⁸ For Addison, the delusions that beset Don Quixote with which this essay began have been thoroughly domesticated. Delusions can now be appreciated, even relished, and the witches, fairies, ghosts, and goblins that had so agitated previous generations offer individuals unexpected mental and emotional delights.

⁵⁷ Addison, "The Pleasures of the Imagination," *The Spectator* 413, June 24 (1712). For an online version, see, for instance at:
<http://www.mnstate.edu/gracyk/courses/web%20publishing/addison413.htm> (last accessed on Jan. 30, 2010).

⁵⁸ Ibid.

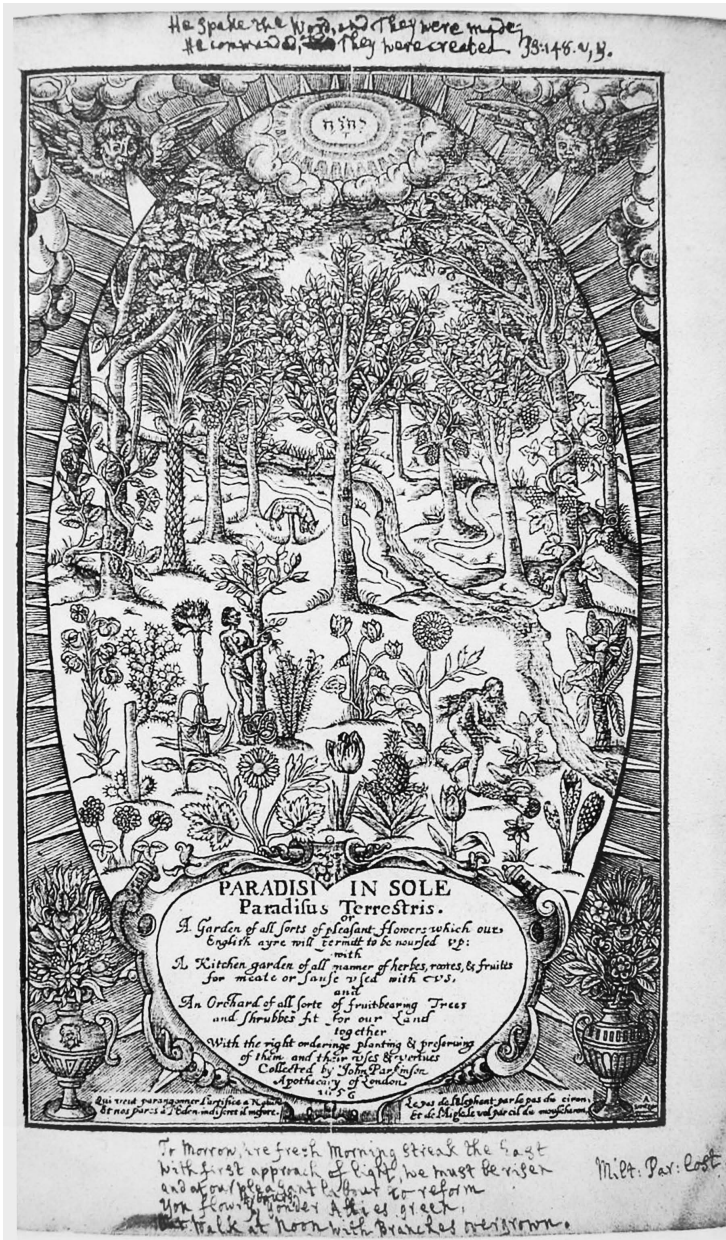


Figure 1: Frontispiece to John Parkinson's *Paradisi in sole paradisus terrestris* (London: H. Lownes and R. Young, [1629] 1656). Reproduced by courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum



Figure 2: Close-up of “the vegetable lamb”



Figure 3: William Hogarth, "Cunicularii, or the Wise Men of Godliman in Consultation" (ca. 1726). Reproduced by courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum



Figure 4: William Hogarth, "Transubstantiation Satirized (1794)." Reproduced by Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum



Figure 5: William Hogarth, "O The Roast Beef of England" (1749). Reproduced by courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum



Figure 6: Miss Chudley (1749). Attributed to Charles Mosley. Reproduced by courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum

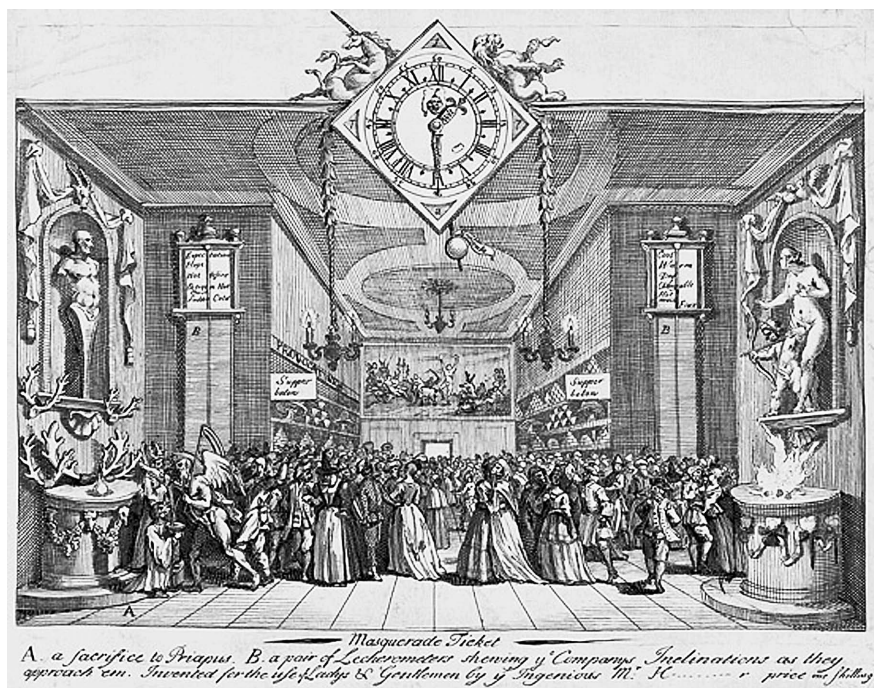


Figure 7: William Hogarth, "Masquerade Ticket" (1727). Tate Gallery, London

List of Illustrations

Illustrations for Albrecht Classen's Introduction

Frontispiece: St. Stephen, East entrance to the cathedral of Bamberg, left side of Adam's Portal (*Adamsportal*), ca. 1230–1240, original today in the cloister, or *Dommuseum* (photo courtesy of Dr. Reinhold Münster, Schweinfurt, Germany)

Figure 1: Reglindis, sculpture in the Naumburg Cathedral, Germany (photo by Linsengericht (wikipedia.com, public domain))

Figure 2: Adelheid of Burgundy, Cathedral of Meissen, Germany (photo by Kolossos, wikipedia.com, public domain)

Figure 3: Empress Kunegunde, entrance to the cathedral of Bamberg, left side of Adam's Portal (*Adamsportal*), ca. 1230–1240, original today in the cloister (photo courtesy of Dr. Reinhold Münster, Schweinfurt, Germany)

Illustrations for Christine Bousquet-Labouërie's article

Figure 1: Saint Jacques de Liège

Figure 2: Beauvais Cathedral: Pig playing organ

Figure 3: Trinity of Vendôme

Figure 4: Saumur: St. Peter's church

Figure 5: Pont de Cé: gossip woman

Figure 6: Trinity of Vendôme: The imposing woman

Figure 7: Chezal-Benoit abbey

Figure 8: Rodez Cathedral

Illustrations for Birgit Wiedl's article

Figure 1: Bamberg, cloister of the Carmelite monastery: corbel with a Jew-beast hybrid, fourteenth century (photo: @Birgit Wiedl)

Figure 2: Regensburg Cathedral, sculpture of a *Judensau* on a buttress on the south wall of the Cathedral, around 1330 (from wikipedia.de, public domain)

Figure 3: Broadsheet showing the Wittenberg *Judensau*, Wolfgang Meissner 1596.

The rendition features the common addition of a second, smaller *Judensau* to the left, while the suckling Jews have badges on their backs (from wikipedia.de, public domain)

Figure 4: Entry to the account book of the Salzburg Mayor Hans Glavenberger, 1487, billing the costs for the *Judensau* on the tower of the town hall (Municipal Archives of Salzburg, BU 264)

Figure 5: *Judensau*. Woodcut, Germany, from a fifteenth-century block (first printed in 1472) (from wikipedia.de, public domain)

Figure 6: Nuremberg, St Sebaldus, sculpture of a *Judensau* on a buttress at the east choir, around 1380 (Bildarchiv Hans-Christoph Dittscheid)

Figure 7: One of the numerous broadsheets showing the Frankfurt *Judensau*, with the typical additions of Simon of Trent above the *Judensau*, and a woman with a he-goat, a horned devil, and the Alte Brückenturm (Old Bridge Tower) as background, eighteenth century. The line above the *Judensau* reads: “Au weyh Rabb Ansch au au mauschi au weyh au au” and is in many renditions followed by the ‘invitation’ to ‘guzzle down the milk and devour the filth’ (from wikipedia.de, public domain)

Illustration for Diane Rudall’s article

Figure 1: *La Devineresse*, 1st ed. (private collection)

Illustrations for Martha Peacock’s article

Figure 1: Anonymous, *Battle for the Trousers*, Rijksprentenkabinet, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

Figure 2: Jan Wierix after Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *Netherlandish Proverbs*, Rijksprentenkabinet, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

Figure 3: Illustration from Johan van Beverwijck’s *Van de uitnementheyt des vrouwelicken geslachts*, Trijn van Leemput, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, The Hague

Figure 4: Anonymous, *Verkeerde Wereld*, Location Unknown, Maurits de Meyer, *De Volks- en Kinderprent in de Nederlanden van de 15e tot de 20e Eeuw* (Antwerp, Amsterdam: N.V. Standaard-Boekhandel, 1962), 12

Figure 5: Joos de Bosscher, *The Upper Hand*, Atlas van Stolk, Rotterdam

Figure 6: Karel van Mander, *Battle for the Trousers*, Albertina Museum, Vienna

Figure 7: Anonymous, *Political Print*, Atlas van Stolk, Rotterdam

Figure 8: Salomon Saverij after Joos Goeimaere, *Three Women in a Room Punishing a Drunkard*, Rijksprentenkabinet, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

Figure 9: Jan Miense Molenaer, *The Irate Wife*, Location Unknown, Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie, The Hague

Figure 10: Attributed to Judith Leyster, *The Catmaker*, Private Collection, Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie, The Hague

Illustration for Thomas Willard's article

Figure 1. Cipher on the door leading to the castle crypt. From *Chymische Hochzeit Christiani Rosencreutz* (Strasbourg: Lazarus Zetzner, 1616)

Illustrations for Allison P. Coudert's article

Figure 1. Caption: Frontispiece to John Parkinson's *Paradisi in sole paradisus terrestris* (London: H. Lownes and R. Young, [1629] 1656).

Figure 2: Caption: Close up of the "Vegetable Lamb."

Figure 3: William Hogarth, "Transubstantiation Satirized" (1794). Reproduced by Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.

Figure 4: William Hogarth, "Cunicularii, or the Wise Men of Godliman in Consultation" (c. 1726). Reproduced by courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.

Figure 5: William Hogarth "O The Roast Beef of Old England" (1749). Reproduced by courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.

Figure 6: Miss Chudley as Iphigenia (1749). Attributed to Charles Mosley. Reproduced by courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.

Figure 7: William Hogarth, "Masquerade Ticket," Tate Gallery, London.

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Index

- | | | | |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Abner of Burgos | 307 | Antoine de la Salle | 37 |
| Abū Bakr | 168, 171, 185 | ape | 677 |
| ‘Abdallāh ibn Mas‘ūd | 172, | Apostles | 68, 304, 443, 445, 500 |
| | 179–82 | Aquinas, Thomas | 33, 34 |
| ‘Abdallāh ibn ‘Umar | 178 | Archpoet | 227, 241 |
| Abū Ḥāmid al-Ġazālī | 175 | Aristophanes | 31, 222, 779 |
| Abū Mūsā al-Ash‘arī | 172 | Aristotle | 2, 8, 12, |
| Abū Razīn al-‘Uqaylī | 171–72, | | 21–23, 199, 216, 488, 500, |
| | 198 | | 548, 670, 718, 778 |
| Abū Sa‘īd al-Hudrī | 172 | <i>Aristotle and Phyllis</i> | 21 |
| Abū Sulaymān al-Haṭṭābī | 194–95 | Arndt, Johann | 782 |
| Abū Ya‘lā | 186–87 | Arnim, Achim von | 766 |
| Agobard of Lyons | 307 | Arnoul d’Orléans | 223 |
| ‘Ā‘īshah | 193 | Arthur, King | 53, 60, 61, 273 |
| Aitheamhuin, Oirgne | 424 | <i>Aucassin et Nicolette</i> | 218 |
| al-Bayhaqī | 185 | Augustine | 211, 549 |
| Alcuin of York | 531 | Averroes | 370 |
| Alfonsi, Petrus | 297, 307 | <i>L’Advocacie Nostre-Dame</i> | 524–25 |
| Alfonso X, King | 281–82, 289, 531 | Ayrer, Jakob A | 516, 529 |
| al-Ġāḥiz | 175–76 | Bakhtin, Mikhail | 215–42, |
| Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal | 184 | | 267, 429–54, 591, 780 |
| ‘Alī ibn Abī Tālib | 173–74 | Bale, John | 653 |
| ‘Alī ibn Rabī‘ah al-Wālibī | 173–74 | Barberino, Francesco da | 251 |
| Alighieri, Dante | 217, 365, | <i>Barlaam and Josaphat</i> | 20 |
| | 369, 388 | <i>Batement van den Katmaecker</i> | 701 |
| “Aloul” (see “Le fabel d’Aloul”) | | <i>The Battle of Maldon</i> | 211 |
| Andrea, Monte | 132, 401, | Bauhin | 81213 |
| | 769, 770, 772, 773, 776, 79, | Beaumarchais | 818 |
| | 781, 784, 787 | Beer, Johann | 417, 717, 730, |
| Angiolieri, Cecco | 101, 365–67, | | 739, 740, 742, 745, 748–49, |
| | 369, 371, 373, 375, 377, 379, 381 | | 752–54, 757–58, 765 |
| Annals of Connacht | 422 | Benedict of Animae | 204 |
| Anselm of Canterbury | 43 | Benedict of Nursia | 32, 43, 55 |

- Benegeli 806
 Benvenuto da Imola 400
Beowulf 87–89, 201–13
 Bergson, Henri 6–8, 67,
 29, 206, 215, 286, 292, 294,
 487–88, 504, 627, 765
 Bernard of Clairvaux 43
 Bernard, Saint 507
 Beroardi, Guglielmo 402–03
 Bible 99, 193, 194, 205, 300,
 308, 309, 324, 330, 354, 507,
 597, 654, 692, 781, 807
 Blümel, Christoph 749
 Bly, Robert 766
 Boccaccio, Giovanni 23–27, 219,
 365, 367, 369, 371, 373, 375,
 377, 379, 381, 462, 571
 Boëthius 531
 “Boivin” 434, 483, 489,
 491, 492
 Bosch, Hieronymus 77, 350
 Boyle, Robert 815
 Bracciolini, Poggio 27, 116, 571,
 584–85
 Brant, Sebastian 139, 738
 Bruegel, Pieter 669, 677, 705
 Burkhart von Hohenvels 258
 Caesarius of Heisterbach 79
 Caligula, Roman Emperor 741
 Callimachus 237
 Calliope 237
Cantigas de Santa Maria 281–94
 Capella, Marcianus 531
 Caracci, Annibale 78
Carmina Burana 15, 241, 548
 Cassian, John 239
 Castiglione, Baldassare 614
 Cats, Jacob 667, 675
 “Cele Qui se fiste foutre” 496
 Cervantes, Miguel Saavedra 10,
 134–35, 805–07
 Chamber, E. K. 351, 618
 Charles, King of Anjou 396
 Charles II 742
 Châtillon, Walter 40, 305
 Chaucer, Geoffrey 63,
 108, 218–19, 457–80, 655
 Chrétien de Troyes 271,
 469–70, 490
 Christ 12, 41, 76,
 99, 114, 116, 179, 227, 291,
 293, 315, 333, 348, 379, 381, 516,
 519, 521–23, 525, 535–36, 543,
 549, 589–92, 662, 740, 771, 815–16
 Chrysostom, John 40–41, 254,
 499, 506, 739
 “Cele Qui se fiste foutre sur la fosse
 de son mari” 494
 Cicero 8, 228, 401, 732
 Clement V, Pope 351, 591
 Clement IV, Pope 351,
 394, 398, 400–01
 Colbert, Jean 791
 Colman, George 137, 816–17
 Colonel von Wangenheim 738
 Comenius, Johann Amos 757,
 809, 810
 Comestor, Petrus 40
Concordia Regularum 204
 Conrad III 351
 Corneille, Thomas 132, 792
 Crowley, Abraham 809
 Cupid 469, 471, 775,
 784–86, 788–89
 Curtius, Ernst Robert 95, 219,
 518, 519
 d’Alembert 525
 D’Ancona, Alessandro 367
 Dardanus 758
 Davanzati, Chiaro 411
Decretum Gratiani 329
 de Bosscher, Joos 692

- de Groot, Hugo 690
 De Lange, Petrus 681
 "De l'arme qui guangna paradis
 par plait" 440–47
 de Léry, Paul 808
 de Parival, Jean Nicolaes 687
 Descartes, René 8, 807, 821
 de Vries, Simon 690–91
 Dietaiuti, Bondie 402
 "Dis ist von dem Heselin"
 549–65
 Doni, Anton Francesco 376
 Donin, Nicholas 307
 Dostoevsky, Fyodor 220, 235, 236
Dulcitius 41
 "Du Cuvier" 436–40
 Durkheim, Emile 231, 235
 Drabek, Pavel 766
Eckenlied 52, 87
 Eco, Umberto Eco 142, 248,
 506, 547–48
 Eddy de Jongh 668
 Elizabeth I of England, Queen
 702
 Epistle 613, 774, 813
 Erasmus of Rotterdam 74–75,
 132–33, 738, 768–69, 779–80,
 812–13
 "L'Esquiritel" 486
 "Estula" 496
 Faba, Guido 224
fabliaux 45, 106–08, 110,
 111, 218, 241, 242, 429–41,
 443, 445, 447, 449, 451–55,
 457, 460, 467, 479, 481–85, 487–97,
 502, 505, 554
 Fabricius 344
 Fastello de' Tosinghi 407
 Fielding, Henry 817
 Filippi, Rustico 101,
 366–67, 369, 371, 373, 375,
 377, 379–82, 385, 386
*Fiore e vita di filosafi ed altri savi ed
 imperadori* 401
 Fleck, Konrad 14
Floris and Blancheflur 12
 Folz, Hans 346–50
 Forgaill, Dallán 417, 418
 Freud, Sigmund 8, 30, 120,
 488, 549, 573, 610, 628, 765, 770
 Frey, Jakob 571
 Ġābir ibn 'Abdallāh 186
 "Gänselein" 19–20
 Gautier de Coincy 227
 Gautier de Châtillon 15
 Geoffrey of Vinsauf 225,
 228, 369–70, 392
 George I, King 814
 Gesner, Conrad 812
 Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola
 810
 Giraldus of Bari 15
 Goethe, Johann Wolfgang 787
 Goldast von Haiminsfeld, Melchior
 113, 515
Golden Legend 41, 239
 Gottfried von Straßburg 13,
 469–70, 553
 Greene, Robert 124, 125, 651–65
 Gregory the Great 212, 336
 Gryphius, Andreas 742, 756
 Guicciardini, Ludovico 673
Guillaume de Palerne 463
 Guittone d'Arezzo 403, 411
Hādī al-arwāḥ ilā bilād al-afrāḥ
 165–200
 Hagedorn 136–37
 Hagen, Friedrich Heinrich von der
 554
 Hartmann von Aue 553,
 556, 563–64
 Hasselaer, Kenau Simons 680

- | | | | |
|-------------------------|----------------------------|---|-----------------------------|
| Heinrich von dem Türlin | 93,
265–78 | Judas | 303, 304 |
| Heldris of Cornwall | 56 | <i>Judensau</i> | 100–01,
217, 219, 325–64 |
| Henry VII, King | 388–89 | Julius II, Pope | 642, 779 |
| Henri d'Andeli | 20–21 | <i>Kaiserchronik</i> | 553 |
| Herbert, George | 223 | Kant, Immanuel | 8, 627 |
| Hercules | 677 | Karel van Mander | 668, 694, 709 |
| Hobbes, Thomas | 8, 40, 80, 627 | Kierkegaard | 8, 549 |
| Hogarth | 135, 814–17 | Kimhi, Joseph | 310 |
| Homer | 141 | Kirchhof, Hans Wilhelm | 116,
571–85 |
| Hommel, Ferdinand | 526 | Konrad, Priest | 553 |
| Hooke, Robert | 810 | Konrad von Würzburg | 549, 565 |
| Horace | 223, 282, 531 | Kormart, Christoph | 741, 743,
753, 765 |
| Hrabanus Maurus | 327 | <i>Kudrun</i> | 13–14 |
| Hrotsvit of Gandersheim | 40,
49, 85, 88, 91, 548 | Kuhnau, Johann | 741–43,
752, 757, 764 |
| Hugo, Primas of Orléans | 15 | Kyeser, Conrad | 75 |
| Hugo of Trimberg | 247 | Langland | 204 |
| Huizinga, Johan | 218 | Latini, Brunetto | 365, 401–02,
406 |
| Humbert of Romans | 595 | <i>Leabhar Mhic Cárthaigh Riabhaigh</i> | 425 |
| Hume, David | 817 | <i>Lebor na hUidre</i> | 417, 425 |
| Hutcheson, Francis | 80 | “Le fabel d'Aloul” | 447–54,
486, 493 |
| Ibn ‘Abd Rabbihi | 192 | “Le Chevalier qui fiste parler des
cons” | 495 |
| Ibn al-Ġawzī | 188–91 | “Le Foteor” | 490 |
| Ibn Ḥuzaymah | 178 | Lehmann, Paul | 228–31 |
| Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyyah | 165–200 | Leonardo da Vinci | 69 |
| Ibn Taymiyyah | 194–200 | “Le Prestre teint” | 486 |
| Jacob de Theramo | 113, 515, 529 | Lessing, Gotthold Ephraim | 80 |
| Jacob of Vitry | 20 | “Les Trois chanoinesses de
Cologne” | 486, 492 |
| Jacob van de Vivere | 690 | “Le Vilain au buffet” | 485–86 |
| Jacobus de Voragine | 20, 41, 85,
94, 239 | “Le Vilain mire” | 489 |
| <i>Jan ende Klaer</i> | 697 | <i>Libro dei Guelfi e dei Ghibellini</i> | 388 |
| Jean de Léry | 808 | <i>Libro del Chiodo</i> | 388–89 |
| Jean Donneau de Visé | 792 | Lindener, Michael | 116, 571 |
| Jeanne d'Albret | 608 | | |
| Johnson, Ben | 422 | | |
| Johnson, Samuel | 740, 817 | | |
| <i>Joseph Andrews</i> | 806 | | |
| Judah ha Levi | 309 | | |

- | | | | |
|---|-----------------|------------------------------------|---|
| <i>Lippijn</i> | 697 | Oldenbarnevelt, Johan | 696 |
| Locke, John | 807 | Ottaviano degli Ubaldini, Cardinal | 400 |
| Lohenstein, Daniel Caspar von | 746 | Otto, Rudolf | 71, 90, 148, 231, 234 |
| Louis de Petit Julleville | 227 | Ovid | 16, 24, 655, 813 |
| Louis XIV of France | 791 | Palamidesse di Bellindote | 402 |
| Luther, Martin | 340, 351 | Palladini | 518, 529 |
| Malipiero, Girolamo | 223 | Pantagruel | 74, 117, 119, 217, 587, 588, 592–94, 598, 599 |
| Marbod of Rennes | 19 | Paracelsus | 811 |
| Manfredi, King | 397–98 | <i>parodia sacra</i> | 215, 217, 219–37, 239–42 |
| Manningham, Sir Richard | 814 | Paul III, Pope | 351 |
| Marguerite de Navarre | 606 | Paul IV, Pope | 27 |
| Marie de France | 469 | Pauli, Johannes | 571 |
| Marprelate, Martin | 652 | Paulsen, Carl Andreas | 742 |
| Marquard von Stein | 256 | Paulsen, Ferdinand Ägidius | 748 |
| Marti, Mario | 369, 371, 386 | Pazzi, Uberto Spiovanati | 396 |
| Martial | 50, 223 | Peter, Saint | 441–42, 445–46, 779–80 |
| Martini, Ramon | 307 | Petrarch | 223, 594, 595 |
| Martinus | 820–21 | Petrus van Gelre | 679 |
| Matthew of Vendôme | 370 | Philip von Zesen | 757 |
| Maurus, Hrabanus | 161, 327 | Pico della Mirandola, | |
| Meckauer, Walter | 766 | Gianfrancesco | 808 |
| <i>Ménagier of Paris</i> | 11 | Pierre of Beauvais | 597 |
| Menander | 31 | <i>Piers Plowman</i> | 204 |
| Milton, John | 127, 715 | Plato | 8, 12, 89, 237, 440, 549, 627, 670, 779 |
| Molière | 640, 793, 803 | Plutarch | 237, 329 |
| Montanus, Martin | 116, 571 | Potage, Jean | 739, 741, 742, 747, 761, 766 |
| Moryson, Fynes | 685, 688 | Printz, Wolfgang Caspar | 740, 742, 744, 746, 752–73, 757, 765 |
| <i>muḥadditūn</i> | 176 | Procopius | 84, 85, 142, 143, 151, 154, 156–62 |
| Muḥammad | 167–200 | Prudentius | 224 |
| Muhlhausen Lipmann, Rabbi | | Quran | 170, 196 |
| Yom Tov | 298 | Quintilian | 531 |
| Newton, Isaac | 807 | Rabelais, François | 74, 118, 217, 220, 224, 228, 234, 499, 518, |
| <i>Nibelungenlied</i> | 50, 87 | | |
| Nicolas de la Reynie | 794, 800 | | |
| <i>Nieu Tafelspel van tve personagien</i> | 698 | | |
| Novati, Francesco | 90, 226–30, 232 | | |
| <i>Novellino</i> | 20 | | |
| <i>Odyssey</i> | 208 | | |

- | | | | |
|---------------------------------------|---|---------------------------|--|
| 587–98, 600–01, 605, 606,
649, 653 | Sprat, Thomas | 809 | |
| Randolph, Thomas | 718, 727 | Stanley, John | 422–23 |
| Ray, John | 813 | Steen, Jan | 668 |
| Reformation, Protestant | 79, 123,
138, 344, 350, 588,
651, 653, 734, 780–81, 804 | Steele, Richard | 820 |
| Richardson | 818 | Sterne | 137, 806–07, 821 |
| Robert, de Blois | 258 | Stubbes, Philip | 654, 656 |
| <i>Rolandslied</i> | 563 | Stubbs, Katherine | 657 |
| <i>Roman de Renart</i> | 217 | Sturm, Samuel | 740 |
| Rousseau | 525 | Swift | 135, 325, 438, 806,
807, 815–16, 820 |
| Ruiz, Juan | 218 | Sybils | 500 |
| <i>Rule of Saint Benedict</i> | 204 | Symons, Trijntje | 681 |
| Rustichini, Fastello | 407 | <i>Tacuinum sanitatis</i> | 3 |
| Sagittarius, Thomas | 223 | <i>Táin Bó Cúailnge</i> | 105, 416, 417 |
| Saint Bernard | 506 | Tarleton, Dick | 746–47 |
| Santayana, George | 8 | Temple, William, Sir | 815 |
| <i>Schadenfreude</i> | 39, 102, 111, 369 | Tenngler, Ulrich | 520 |
| Scherzer, Johann Adam | 742 | Tertullian | 739 |
| Schopenhauer, Arthur | 8 | Thomasin von Zerclaere | 92, 250 |
| Schumann, Valentin | 116, 571 | Till Eulenspiegel | 45,
122, 130, 134, 571, 738, 751, 758 |
| <i>The Second Shepherds' Play</i> | 531–40 | Toirpéist, Seanchán | 105,
415–18, 423–25 |
| <i>Secretum secretorum</i> | 3 | Traube, Ludwig | 90, 230, 234 |
| Severus, Sulpicius | 40 | <i>Tromdhámh Guaire</i> | 415–21,
426–27 |
| Shaftesbury, Earl | 40,
136–37, 627 | Ubalduino, Cardinal | 400 |
| Shakespeare, William | 10, 31,
422, 766 | Udall, Nicholas | 653 |
| <i>Shem Hamphoras</i> | 344 | Ulrich von Liechtenstein | 244–64, 263 |
| Simon de Vries | 690, 691 | Urban IV, Pope | 591 |
| Simon of Trent | 334, 343, 345, 364 | <i>Uraicecht na Ríar</i> | 424 |
| Sir Reresby, John | 688 | van Leeuwenhoek, Anton | 810 |
| Sir Gawain and the Green Knight | 60, 62, 206 | Valkenauer, Hans | 342 |
| Skelton, John | 653 | van Beverwijck, Johan | 679–80 |
| Socrates | 779, 781 | van de Vivere, Jacob | 690 |
| Solomon ben Moses de Rossi | 302, 305, 515 | van Gelre | 679 |
| Spencer, Herbert | 8 | van Leemput, Trijn | 680 |
| Spinola | 696 | van Leeuwenhoek, Anton | 810 |
| | | van Mander, Karel | 694 |
| | | van Overbeke | 672 |

- Velten, Johann 4, 342,
654, 743, 749
- Venus 448, 468,
470, 474, 774, 782, 785–87, 820
- Vespermann, Gerd 766
- Vockerodt, Gottfried 739
- Vouet, Simon 77
- Wakefield 95, 114, 532,
533, 540, 545
- Walter of Châtillon 306
- Waltharius* 47–49
- Walther von der Vogelweide 35,
39, 247, 565
- Weise, Christian 737
- Wickram, Jörg 571
- William of Baskerville, Monk
547
- Winsbeckin* 18
- Wittenwiler, Heinrich 8, 67, 556
- Wolfram von Eschenbach 53, 91
- Zesen, Philip von 757